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DOROTHY FOX

BY

, LOUISA PARR

AUTHOR OF "ADAM AND EVE," "ROBIN," &c

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CHAPTER I.

THE FORTUNE OF WAR.

T was in the summer of 1856. The war being at an end, England began to forget the excitement and military ardour which for two years had pervaded her every nook and corner. But at the principal seaports the memory was still kept alive by reckless soldiers and sailors spending their hard-earned money, and by their less fortunate comrades wandering about pale and haggard, some on crutches, some in splints, waiting to hear the decision of pension or discharge—the only two alternatives left for them.

At the top of one of those narrow streets of the old town of Plymouth, leading from the Barbican, a crowd of sailors, fish-women, apprentices (boys and girls), had assembled to witness a fight. Through this motley crowd a soldier-like man was almost vainly endeavouring to

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push his way. He was pale and thin from recent illness, and his bandaged arm showed the cause of his suffering.

‘Good heavens !’ he thought, ‘how sick and faint I feel ! I wish I had listened to the doctor, and not have been in such a hurry to come out. I wonder if there is any place hereabout where I could sit down for a little while.’

He walked more rapidly on towards the Guildhall, passing a saddler’s, an ironmonger’s, a goldsmith’s, until he came to a shop with a fat gilt lamb hanging over the door, and having opposite it an old round clock, stretching its face into the street. Here a curious sensation came over him, which made the lamb and the clock’s face seem to change places ; and he had just sense enough left to turn into the open door and sink into a chair, as a voice reached him from the distance : ‘How can I serve thee ?’ Then all became still and dark and blank.

The name of the young man was Charles Verschoyle ; the shop he had entered belonged to Nathaniel Fox, cloth and woollen draper ; and the voice which inquired, ‘How can I serve thee ?’ came from his daughter Dorothy, who, while she was speaking, saw, to her great terror and perplexity, the stranger’s head sink back, and a pallor, as of death, spread itself over his face.

She gave a little cry, and exclaimed, ‘Oh dear ! what can be the matter with him ? And Mark away, and Judith out ! What shall I do ?’

She then leaned across the counter, saying, in a louder voice, ‘Friend ! friend ! art thou ill ?’ And then something she saw in the white face forced her, despite her

THE FORTUNE OF WAR

fear, to run forward and put out her arm to support his falling head. Now, seeing his bandaged arm, she dismissed an idea which had crossed her mind that, perhaps, he had been drinking. She said tenderly, 'Poor fellow, it is his arm that has caused this sudden faintness. If I had but some water, or mother's smelling-salts, he would most likely revive.'

At this moment the inner door of the shop opened, and a bright-faced, middle-aged woman, with a thick-frilled white cap, appeared.

'Oh, Judith ! Judith ! come here. I am so glad thou art returned. While thou hast been away, see, this poor man has come into the shop ; and he has fainted. Do run and get some water.'

Before Judith obeyed, she came over to have a closer inspection of the sufferer, saying, 'Are you sure, now, he's swooning ?—it isn't tricks or drink ?' But, without waiting for a reply, she continued, after looking at the face, almost as white as the kerchief against which it leaned, 'God forgive the thought ! and his poor broken arm tied up to his side.'

The young man heaved a deep sigh.

'Oh, do run, Judith, and get the water !' exclaimed Dorothy, anxiously bending over him ; and he, suddenly opening his eyes, met the earnest gaze, took in the childish face, wondered where he was, then leaned his head back, and forgot it all again.

Judith returned with the water, and sprinkled it over his face ; while Dorothy chafed his hands, as she had seen her mother do to her Aunt Abigail.

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‘Judith, dost thou think mother and father would object, if we asked him to rest awhile on the sofa until he finds strength enough to walk home?’

Judith looked dubious. Master and mistress were away. If they had been at home she would not have hesitated. And Mark was out too. ‘No,’ she thought, ‘we had better not.’

Dorothy looked grave. ‘Thou might ask him to stay until Mark comes. Then he could fetch him a cab. It is nearly five o’clock ; and Mark is always here at half-past.’

Judith shook her head : she was not certain whether it was safe.

‘Mother says we are always to do good one to another,’ persisted Dorothy ; ‘and the text quoted last First-day in Dorcas Horsenail’s discourse was—“Be not forgetful to entertain strangers ; for, thereby, some have entertained angels unawares.”’

‘Well, then, I wish this was one !’ exclaimed Judith, in perplexity, ‘and that he would fly away ; for, as it is, I don’t know what to do with him, and that’s the truth.’

‘Hush !’ said Dorothy, with the double intention of reprobating Judith’s levity, and because the stranger was coming to himself. She shrank back ; and, Judith, finding she was expected to take the initiative, demanded, ‘Are you better, sir ?’

‘Better ? Oh yes !’ returned the young man, with a short gasp between each sentence. ‘What has been the matter ? Where am I ? I am afraid I have been giving some trouble.’

'Indeed, no,' said Dorothy, coming forward. 'I am only glad thou wert able to reach here.'

'You are both very kind,' he answered. 'I am quite unable to thank you.' And such a soft expression came into his dark eyes and lit up his wan face, that all Judith's former prudence gave way, and, to Dorothy's great satisfaction, she begged he would walk into the parlour behind the shop, and rest on the sofa for awhile.

'Nobody will disturb you there, sir. And if you don't feel strong enough to walk by the time our shopman comes, he can call ye a cab.'

Thinking that she was the mistress of the house, Captain Verschoyle thanked her, and accepting her invitation and assistance (for he still felt very unsteady), he went into the substantially furnished parlour, threw himself on the large old-fashioned sofa, and was asleep before Dorothy returned with the ginger cordial she had been getting to revive him.

Very few customers were likely to come into the shop, for Nathaniel Fox's business was principally confined to wholesale and private orders. So, telling Judith she would sit quietly until Mark returned, and she was ready, Dorothy seated herself in the only approach to an easy-chair—one of carved oak, black, and stiff-backed. Taking her knitting in her hand, she furtively glanced at the sleeper, but, finding he was quite unconscious, she let her hand drop idly in her lap, and her eyes gaze earnestly and seriously. 'He must have been very ill,' she thought. 'How beautifully white his hand is!' and then she regarded the little pink-dimpled pair which lay in her own

lap with a critical and rather dissatisfied expression. 'What long eyelashes he has!' and first one eye and then the other is shut to see if a glimpse of her own can be obtained. No, nothing but the tip of the provoking little nose ; and her gaze falls again on the young man who, from his bearing, may perhaps be a soldier wounded in the war. At this thought she gives a little shudder, takes up her knitting, and works away most industriously for fully ten minutes. Then the click-click of the needles cease, and her thoughts begin to wander. Her reverie this time is so deep that she does not notice that the sleeper has awakened, and is in his turn attentively inspecting her. As she sat in the old black carved chair, in her gown of soft grey stuff, with her rebellious hair (in spite of brushing and tight fastening up) twined into little golden rings, her fair face, almost infantine in its youthfulness, gave such a ridiculous impression of primness and juvenescence that Captain Verschoyle was reminded of nothing so much as of some lovely child playing at being a staid woman.

The deep tones of the Guildhall clock striking six were now heard, the chimes of St Andrew's repeated the hour, and Judith softly opened the door, closing it again as she saw Dorothy put her finger to her lip. But the disturbance seemed to have roused the young man, who opened his eyes and sat up.

'Dost thou feel better?' asked Dorothy, anxiously.

'Oh yes ; I am all right again now ; but you do not mean to say it is six o'clock? Why, what have I been thinking of? I had no idea of going to sleep when I sat

down—not that I am particularly clear about what happened after I reached here.'

'Did thou feel ill suddenly, or was it thy intention to come here?'

'No; I was passing the door when I became quite faint.'

'Thy arm doubtless was the cause. I see it is bandaged,' she said with a pitiful voice.

'Oh! my wound is a mere scratch,' replied Captain Verschoyle. 'I am weak from fever and ague, and though I have been in Plymouth a month, this is the first time I have ventured so far. The doctor advised me against going out to-day, but I thought I was much stronger than it seems I am. I do not know what would have become of me if I hadn't had strength enough to stagger in here. Fate was unusually good to send me where I should meet with so much hospitality. I really cannot express how very grateful I feel for your kindness.'

'Oh! do not speak of it,' said Dorothy; 'I only did what mother would have me do. Art thou sure that thou art sufficiently strong to walk? Mark can get thee a cab in a few minutes.'

'Thanks; I will not trouble him; the air may revive me, for my head is a little heavy.' He took out a card and gave it to Dorothy, saying, 'Will you give my thanks to your mother? Good-bye;' and he held out his hand.

'Farewell,' she said, giving him hers; 'and I hope if thou should ever be near and feel weary, thou wilt not hesitate to come in and rest.'

'Thank you very much.' Again he looked round the

shop, but seeing no one but Mark, he turned once more to Dorothy and said, 'You will not forget to give my adieu and thanks to your good mother,' and was gone.

'My good mother,' thought she ; 'what does he mean. Oh ! perhaps he thought that Judith was my mother,' and she smiled as she contrasted the two. Then she looked at the card and read, 'Captain Charles Egerton Verschoyle, 17th Lancers.' Then he *was* a soldier, one of the men belonging to a profession her father and friends generally condemned. She was still recalling all the details of this little episode when Judith appeared, ready dressed in her shawl and bonnet.

'Why, Judith, art thou ready ? I will not keep thee a moment.'

'That's right, dear ; make haste or the omnibus will be here. Mark is looking out for it to pass the church corner.'

Dorothy was soon down again, and Judith inquired, 'Was the young man all right before he left ? I saw him go as I was putting on my things.'

'Yes, but he said he had a headache ; and, dost thou know ? I think he took thee for mother.'

'Twas like his impudence then, not to see you were a young lady, and his better most like.'

'Why, Judith, how funny thou art !' laughed Dorothy ; 'how could he tell anything about us ? And besides thou would'st make a very nice mother, I think.'

'Bless your dear heart,' replied Judith fondly, 'it's a proud mother I'd be with such a treasure as you in my keepin' ; but marryin' ain't for the like of me, child. The

only man I ever looked with favour on, things went bad with, and he had to go for a soldier, and whether he's living or dead, poor boy, is more than I know now, or perhaps ever shall.'

'That was very sad!' said Dorothy, who knew Judith's love-story by heart. 'The young man who was faint was a soldier. He did not look like one, did he?'

'Oh, they're all good-looking enough,' returned Judith; 'and I'm not one for sending them all to the bottomless pit wholesale, like the master does; as the sayin' is, "nobody's so black as they're painted;" and though there's no soldiers at the Friends' meetin', they can't keep the flesh and the devil out—no, nor never will as long as the members there are men and women.'

Happily the omnibus arrived at this moment, or Judith would have given a lecture in justification of her speech, for being a strict Methodist, she could not resist a little hit now and then at what she considered the Quakers' spiritual pride, much as she approved of them.

The Foxes did not live at their place of business; they had a pleasant old-fashioned country-house near Compton Giffard, and thither the omnibus was now carrying Judith and Dorothy, her mother and father being absent for a few days. Dorothy had gone in the morning to spend the day with Judith, who attended to the domestic duties of the Plymouth establishment. After leaving the omnibus they turned down a lane, at the widest part of which stood a long white gate, shaded by two thick elm trees. This was the entrance to the house, a rambling old-fashioned place, half of it the original manor dwelling, and

the other half added to it at various times, as adorning or enlarging was needed. There was nothing at all pretentious, it only looked a comfortable, carefully kept house. Nathaniel Fox would have been horrified at the idea of its being thought anything but a house becoming a well-to-do tradesman to dwell in, yet more was expended on it than upon many a country seat. Order and neatness reigned everywhere, and the gardens had a prim old world air that set off to advantage the gabled roof, the small, high, narrow windows with their diamond panes, and the fantastic chimneys, half wreathed with long sprays of ivy and virginian creeper.

Just now the master and mistress were attending a quarterly meeting at Exeter. Generally Cousin Dymond came and kept Dorothy company during these visits; but she was ill, and Dorothy was for the first time left entirely alone with the two maids, Judith coming out every night, and seeing that all was going on rightly. On Thursday or Friday her mother would return, with such a deal to tell her—when Elizabeth Sparks was going to be married, and whether Josiah Crewdson intended coming to them on a visit. As she sat at supper in the old nursery, now dedicated to Judith's especial use, she speculated on the probability of these events.

‘I wish father would have given his consent to my being one of Elizabeth's bridesmaids, but he does not approve of their giving up the dress of Friends.’

‘Well, my dear,’ answered Judith, ‘I quite hold with him there, as long as he stops short of the bonnet and cap; but when I thought he was going to frump you up

in them coal-scuttle things, I seemed to be turned against the dress entirely.'

'Oh! Judith, I do so hope I shall not be obliged to wear them; but the Crewdsons are so very strict. Thou knowest Josiah dresses as a Friend. I wonder if he is coming here; father has asked him;' and Dorothy sat looking thoughtfully for a few minutes, then she suddenly demanded, 'Would thou be very sorry for me to be married, Judith?'

'Would I be sorry if I heard the sun was never to shine agen for me, darlin? ' said Judith, fondly; and Dorothy went over and put her arms round her old nurse's neck, saying, 'Why do people want to get married at all? I cannot bear to think of ever leaving father and mother and thee; but it will not be for years to come yet, I hope.'

'Ah, now! ' exclaimed Judith, 'I won't have ye wait too long. Grace was but twenty-one, and I'm not going to have my bantling behind her.'

'Oh! but Grace is so happy.'

'Well, and so will you be too. Mr Crewdson is a worthy, good man, they all say, and so he need be, for it wouldn't be a saint I'd think more than a match for my cosset.'

'Thou art a foolish fond old Judith,' said Dorothy, laughing; 'as mother says, thy vanity will spoil me. I ought to be very thankful to be chosen by one so respected and highly approved of; but sometimes I think, and wish—oh! I cannot tell thee what, for I do not know myself—but there goes nine o'clock, so we must go down

for reading.' And they descended into the dining-room, and the two maids came in. Dorothy read the appointed chapters and an explanation, dismissed them, and went to her room, attended by Judith, who persisted in considering her as helpless as when she was under her special care. Dorothy Fox at nineteen was both older and younger than most girls of her age. When she was only ten, Grace, her half sister, had married, and she had no brothers or sisters of her own. She was her mother's constant companion, and the only society she saw was composed of people much older than herself, whose conversation was principally confined to the proceedings of the Friends. For some years past a great revolution in their ideas had set in, causing much division among them. The younger members were beginning to object strongly to the peculiar dress and mode of speech ; and while they fondly approved of the faith in which they had been nurtured, they made a stand against being so entirely shut out from amusements in which they considered they might join without harm to themselves, or scandal to the profession they made.

Dorothy's father had seen with pain his eldest daughter and her husband become leaders in the new school. This made him doubly anxious that Dorothy should unite herself to a man who had been brought up like herself to hold firmly to every principle of the Society of Friends, and look with displeasure upon any innovation. And all these good qualities he found in Josiah Crewdson, the son of an old friend of his. For many years an alliance between the young people had been the sincere desire of

the two fathers. Old Stephen Crewdson had died about two summers before, but not until he had made known his wishes to his son, and counselled him to carry them out. A few months back Nathaniel had, with Josiah's knowledge, spoken to Dorothy, and she had promised him that if it were possible she would not place any obstacle to the fulfilment of his desire. She had not seen Josiah since she was a child ; but she had heard a great deal about him, so perhaps she should like him. Of course, as father wished it, she would try, and then, except when some special event, such as his forthcoming visit, called it up, the thing almost seemed to die out of her memory.

Her mother was the only person who raised any objection. She had recently seen Josiah at York, and it did not seem to her that he possessed many qualities to win a young girl's heart—particularly such a girl as Dorothy, who, in spite of all the repression of her education, possessed an extra share of idealism and romance, mixed with much strength of will and purpose. Patience knew her daughter's character well enough to feel that love was a necessity to its perfection. Then again she could not help saying to herself, 'Surely such a face might win any heart.'

Few persons who casually met the young Quaker passed her without turning again to look at her sweet beauty ; but to those who could watch her, look into her earnest brown eyes, shaded by their long dark lashes—to those who loved her and whom she loved, Dorothy's face was the dearest, most winning face in all the world. She was full of gaiety, admiring all that was beautiful, and delight-

ing in sweet sounds and gay colours, in which she longed to deck herself. Her life hitherto had been, though happy and contented, quiet to excess. Since she had stayed a few days at Fryston with her sister, she had felt much more curiosity about the world beyond her own home. She was not quite certain she felt so thankful, as her father daily expressed himself, that the world was unknown to him and his family. She would have liked rather to see a little more of it; but perhaps all this was wrong. So she checked the natural desire one minute only to renew her wandering into some fresh subject the next, until she was lost in dreams of a world fashioned after her own young imagination—a sweet garden of Eden ~~and~~ roses and rose-coloured.

CHAPTER II.

‘**L**IKE THE PRINCE AND PRINCESS IN THE FAIRY TALES.’

AS Captain Verschoyle walked through the busy streets, after leaving Nathaniel Fox’s shop, he felt that though the cool summer air fanned his hot head, it sent a shiver through the rest of his body. Still he thought it would be better to walk for a little distance than to ride at once ; so he proceeded at a tolerably brisk pace until he came to the little toll-gate, from which he could see the hospital, though how to get to it did not exactly occur to him.

‘Why, sir !’ replied the toll-man, in answer to his inquiry, ‘you’ve come a brave bit out of your way. You should have gone up Eldad-hill, and round by No-place ; but there—your leg ain’t in a sling, though your arm may be, so ten minutes one way or t’other won’t make much odds. You go straight on till you come to a little gate,

and then through the path, on to the posts, through they, and up a lane, past the Rectory, and up another lane, and there you be with the gates right before you. You can't miss it, if you mind what I've told you.'

The consequence of this direction was that the young man did not find the gates right before him until the heavy dews were falling thick and wetting the grass he was obliged to walk through. The old doctor shook his head at him, and advised him to get off to bed as soon as possible. Captain Verschoyle stoutly held to it that he should be all right by the morning, and able to go out the next day—when it had been decided he should have his discharge. Yet the next discharging day to that went by and found him still an inmate of the hospital suffering from another feverish attack, which, though slight, had kept him from joining his mother and sister at Exeter, and going with them to Shilston Hall, as he had previously arranged to do. This fresh illness had upset all his plans, and now it would be quite another week before he could leave the hospital. No wonder, then, he was sitting rather ruefully when his man brought him this letter:—

‘MY DEAR CHARLIE,

‘It is some days since we heard from you, and I cannot help thinking you are worse than you say. You do not know how I long to see you, nor how disappointed I was to find you were not at Exeter to meet us. As we have old Marshall with us, I have begged mamma to let her go with me to see you, and she has consented. So I am coming, and you may expect me to-morrow. You

dear old thing ! I hope you are not really worse, and that you will be glad to see your loving sister,

‘ AUDREY.’

‘ Bless her heart !’ exclaimed Captain Verschoyle ; ‘ glad to see her, I should think I should be, for I began to feel as if my coming home couldn’t make much difference to any one.’

‘ Here, Hallett !’ to his servant, ‘ I expect a lady to see me ; go down to the gates and watch for a cab driving up, and when they ask for me, tell Miss Verschoyle you are my servant waiting to show her the way to my quarters ; but first, just see all straight here.’

‘ Yes, sir ;’ and the man left, and his master drew a chair to the window where he might be able to catch a momentary glimpse of his visitors before they entered the building. Everything looked very much brighter than it had done an hour before. It was so pleasant to know somebody was coming who would make him feel he was at home again. Why, except that good motherly shop-keeper and her pretty daughter, no woman had spoken to him since his return ; and then he smiled to himself to think how, through the dreams resulting from the drugged sleep and subsequent wanderings of the fever, he had been haunted by the quaint grey figure. ‘ I suppose,’ he thought, ‘ the brain is acted upon by its last vivid impression. Well ! I’m glad mine was such a pleasant one, for the child was very pretty,—not a bit like the mother. Past two o’clock. I hope nothing has prevented Audrey coming, I should be so disappointed.’ But before he had

time for more reflection he heard a rustle, a sound of voices, the door was thrown open, and his sister had her arms round his neck.

‘Oh, how good it is to feel you are safe back once more !’ she exclaimed after a few moments ; then giving him another great hug, ‘I did not know I loved you so much, Charlie, until I thought we might never meet again. Now, let me have a good look at you. Well, you are thin and pale, of course, but you are just as good-looking as ever.’

Captain Verschoyle laughed. ‘You are just the same, Audrey, thinking of good looks at once. I verily believe if I was going to execution you would be anxious that my personal appearance should be all you desire.’

‘Of course I should. Why, what have we to trade upon but our family and good looks ?’ And now tell me about my own appearance : I’m dying to hear. I have not fallen off ?’

‘You peacock !’ exclaimed her brother, ‘you know you are as handsome as ever. How is it you are not married ?’

‘Ah, the universal question !’ she replied. ‘Because—because—because I am not ; but don’t look so grave, for I am seriously thinking of it, and am busy weaving a snare into which my bird will most certainly fall. Why, I am eight-and-twenty, Charles,—an awful age for a spinster. You cannot imagine my feelings every time I see Aunt Spencer, and hear her invariable, “Audrey, my dear, excuse my saying it, but it’s *quite* time you were married.” And then people are beginning to appeal to my memory

in the most inconvenient manner, saying, “ *You* must remember that, Miss Verschoyle ; it isn’t more than ten years ago since it happened.” Why do we ever grow old, Charlie ? It does not matter for men, but for women, oh dear, dear ! However, mamma has a splendid scheme on hand,—a millionaire for me, and an heiress for you ; and I’m sure *you’ll* succeed, for nothing wins a woman’s heart like a warrior bold, pale and wounded.’

‘ Well, I’m glad you have settled my fate for me,’ said Captain Verschoyle, ‘ for I’m thoroughly home-sick, and want to settle down. So as long as I have no trouble in the matter, I’m prepared to go in and win ; that is, if she’s anything decent, hasn’t a hump, or a squint, and isn’t forty.’

‘ Oh no, she’s very nice,’ replied Audrey, ‘ and is young and foolish. The latter may be a recommendation. And now to tell you all about mamma. First and foremost, she sent you her dearest love and a kiss, then she desired you would have camphor put among your clothes for fear of bringing home infection ; next, that nothing but her wretched health and weak nerves prevented her coming to see you ; and lastly, she begs you will have your hair cut at once, or it may fall off and leave you prematurely bald.’

Captain Verschoyle smiled, saying, ‘ Ah, I see you go on as usual ! How is the old lady ? ’

‘ Why, a great deal better than she would be if she heard her beloved son inquire after her by that opprobrious title. Yes, we squabble, and I am rude, and penitent, just as I used to be, and get caressed and appealed to in public and scolded and snubbed in private. But it

really is more my fault than hers. I did not want to go to Shilston Hall, but to come on here to you. However, mamma said she could not afford it, though it would not have cost much. I detest Shilston, and the Brocklehursts are such a set—every one of them possessed of an entire and peculiar meanness, and each trying for the old lady's money by setting her against the rest of the competitors. One of the most powerful arguments in my favour was, that I had had a tilt with her, and I told mamma a day's absence was the only chance I had left. That reminds me I must call Marshall in and decide about the train to return by.'

'Return,' echoed Captain Verschoyle. 'Why must you go back? I cannot get away from here for four days, and if we could spend them together it would be quite a holiday; and this is such a pretty place. Hallett could get lodgings for you and Marshall close by, and I can get out all day. What do you say? Would you mind staying?'

'Mind it!' said Audrey, 'why, I should like it of all things, but how can we manage it? Shall we call Marshall in and hear her ideas? I left her in the next room.' So she opened the door and admitted Marshall, a small thin woman, who had been Audrey's maid since she was a child, and therefore knew Captain Verschoyle well enough to shake his hand and heartily hope he was gaining strength. After the due inquiries had been made, Audrey told her the plan they had in view.

'Now, Mrs M., give me the benefit of your wise head, and tell me what's the best thing to do.'

‘Well, Miss, what have you made up your mind to do?’ said Marshall.

‘Why, to stay, of course,’ replied her mistress, ‘only mamma is sure to object, you know; so how can we manage?’

‘Well, Miss, thinking if Captain Charles was very ill you might remain, I’m prepared with your bag for one night; after that I suppose I must go back to Shilston for some more things, though I know her ladyship will be terribly put out with me.’

‘I have it,’ exclaimed Captain Verschoyle. ‘I will send Hallett off by the next train, telling mamma I won’t let you go, and that she must let you stay, or I shall never get well; that I will take care of you, see you are comfortably lodged, and pay all the expenses.’

This plan meeting with universal approbation, Hallett was called to receive his orders; and during the two hours he had to spare before starting he was desired to take Mrs Marshall and seek lodgings in the village close by. Captain Verschoyle went to see what arrangements he could make for giving them some refreshments, and Audrey was left to herself.

She took a survey of the room, opened a book or two lying on the table, and then stood at the window looking at the picturesque Dutch sort of view of the neighbouring town. Was it because in this scantily-furnished room there was nothing to arrest attention, that Audrey Verschoyle looked such a striking object? No. Had you seen her surrounded by luxury and magnificence, it would have been the same. She possessed a something that, no

matter where she was or in what company, you singled her out, and wondered who she could be. Not that she was particularly beautiful. Indeed, many laughed when they heard her good looks brought forward as a reason for the attention she received, notwithstanding her wonderful eyes, and tall, graceful figure. After you had talked to her, however, you were generally fascinated. She seemed to speak and move exactly as you desired—to satisfy your admiration, and make you constantly think she was the most elegant woman you had ever seen. But one thing struck every one: that she must always have been a woman, never a girl with thoughtless winning ways, never a child with gleeful boisterous mirth. Yes, Audrey was always a thorough-bred, self-possessed woman, who studied every art by which she could make herself fascinating, who valued without overrating each attraction she commanded, and who could give her rivals all credit for the charms they possessed, inasmuch as she exactly estimated her own power to compete with them. Her sprightly wit made her a delightful companion, and after she had been amusing you through a long conversation, her tact would cause you to leave feeling that she had been equally interested and was as sorry to part from you as you were to go from her. Notwithstanding all this, many a man and woman who had been perfectly fascinated by Audrey Verschoyle sighed when she left them—sighed to think what a sacrifice of happiness these perfections had cost her—felt sure that times often came when she wearily longed for the great happiness without which all women's lives must be crownless—some one to love. Not to love

her alone, for many a heart had been offered to her, but some one to whose love her own heart could respond. She used to say, 'Love, you know, is a luxury for the rich and poor only ; we who stand on middle ground must be content to live without it.' And apparently she had contrived to live without it happily enough. She had had her disappointments — elder sons who had seemed secured had suddenly seceded to some country hoyden or beauty fresh from the school-room ; rich bachelors who, on the very eve of triumph, had taken fright and flight and so kept their liberty ; wealthy old men whom death had snatched from their would-be bride. Still Audrey carried all off with a high hand, openly expressing her disappointment and chagrin, always laughingly saying, 'People should marry for what they value most, and I value nothing so much as fine houses, and carriages, and clothes, money and position ; and as fate has ordained that these good things shall not be my portion during my single state, why I must try and get them by my own exertions, and I shall appreciate them so thoroughly that I am certain to make an excellent wife to whoever is good enough to bestow any or all upon me.'

Perhaps there was some excuse for Miss Verschoyle's love of money, for ever since she could remember, it had been the thing lamented and longed for at home. Colonel Verschoyle was a younger son of a very good family. He had been brought up in luxury, so that extravagance was habit to him. He spent every farthing of his rather liberal allowance on himself. He went into the best society, mixed with people who either had large incomes, or lived

as if they had them, went wherever it was the fashion to go, did whatever it was the fashion to do, and one season, it being the fashion to fall in love, fell in love with Lady Laura Granville. He proposed to her and was accepted. Lady Laura had always been allowed to have her own way, and she would not be ruled in the choice of a husband. She had no idea of the value of money, and as she saw Colonel Verschoyle could supply all his own wants, she thought he would be able to give her all she had been accustomed to. Her father the more readily yielded to her wishes, from the fact that a failure on the turf had ruined him and made it highly desirable that he should speedily break up his establishment and retire abroad. After their marriage, notwithstanding they both talked a great deal of the economy they intended practising, each felt it very hard to make any the least personal sacrifice. Colonel Verschoyle did not find domestic happiness a sufficient compensation for the horses he had to give up, or the club he could no longer afford to belong to ; and Lady Laura, in her turn, yawned and felt weary at the end of a quiet *tête-à-tête* evening, on which she had been obliged to send a refusal to some dinner party or ball, because another new dress could not be afforded. As time went on the birth of a son and daughter increased their expenses ; and the struggle to compete and keep up an appearance due to the set in which they mixed became more apparent and irksome, leading to constant bickerings between the husband and wife. Charles had seen little of this, being at school during his boyhood, and then going at once into the army ; but Audrey had felt it

bitterly, had seen with the keenness of a child's intuitive sense of fairness how selfish her father often was, and how deceitful her mother proved to be. Regarding the want of money as the cause of all this evil, she determined at a very early age, that when she entered into the world, wealth should be her chief object.

'I have mamma's experience before me,' she used to say; 'hers was a love-match, and it proves that love without money *cannot* give happiness; but money without love, though it may not give happiness, can give many things which enable you to bear your life very contentedly.'

Colonel Verschoyle had been dead ten years, and Lady Laura's income as a widow was tolerably good, or would have been, had she been contented to live quietly without straining to give the world an impression that she possessed double the sum she had. The fact that Audrey was still unmarried was a sore disappointment to her mother, and every year her mortification increased. She detested girls who had the slightest pretensions to beauty, and if she could insidiously depreciate any one whom she regarded as her daughter's rival, she never missed an opportunity of doing so. This weakness in turn annoyed and amused Audrey, who with all her failings had not a trace of meanness. She delighted in a thrust-and-parry encounter with any girl whose object in life she considered to be the same as her own; and as long as they were together, often tipped her arrows with a little covert lady-like venom. But let them part, and her rival was quite safe from Audrey; and woe betide the man who, presuming on the too frequent foible of a woman, presented

her with a dish of flattery at her adversary's expense, or, while paying her a string of compliments, depreciated the absent one's recognized advantages.

Lady Laura was as selfish with her children as she had been with her husband. Audrey might positively refuse to go somewhere, or to do something on which Lady Laura had set her heart, but, as she said, 'she had always in the end to give in to mamma ;' for when argument and threats failed, Lady Laura had her delicate health and shattered nerves to fall back upon ; and they were the result, according to herself, of a life devoted to her ungrateful daughter. Her great love was centred in Charles ; she seemed to look upon the two from perfectly distinct points. Her son had been given her to love ; her daughter had been given her to marry. True, even her love for him could not overcome her rooted dread of infection : gladly would she have gone to him, but the very name of hospital conjured up horrid visions of fever and small-pox ; and though she had, after much pleading and entreaty, allowed Audrey to go to see her brother, she was terrified she might catch some of those horrid complaints during her visit ; and, as she put it, 'a serious illness at Audrey's age would blight her prospects for ever, ruin her complexion and her hair, and make her look quite plain and old ; and then, perhaps, she'd become a district visitor or a sister of mercy, for there was no knowing what peculiar things girls would consider their vocation when all their good looks had vanished.' So she began to heartily regret she had let Audrey go, and to half wish she had gone herself and seen after her dear boy. Miss

Brocklehurst comforted her by saying that Audrey had considerably raised herself in her opinion, and if she considered it right to stay with her brother, instead of returning for the bazaar and flower-show, *she* would see that she was not a loser in the end. This declaration from a lady who, as compensation for all the caprices and disagreeable humours she saw fit to inflict on her relations, had announced her intention of leaving fifty thousand pounds to the one who treated her best, filled Lady Laura with joy. In her imagination Audrey was already an heiress, spending her income under her mother's sole direction and management. Lady Laura was thus in a frame of mind that made Hallett's task a very easy one. He accordingly left under the impression that Marshall was the most wrong-sighted and prejudiced of her sex, and that 'it's no good trying to please women, for anybody who'd call master's mother a dragon of a temper—well ! he wished they'd had a taste of two or three of the tempers he had had to put up with in his day.'

Before an hour had elapsed Captain Verschoyle had joined his sister, and Marshall had returned to announce that they had found some rooms which would suit them in Paradise Row, close by ; and if they liked, that the landlady would see about getting them a substantial tea at once.

' Oh ! that would be much nicer, Charles, than having anything here ; and as it will be quite early, we can take a stroll or drive together after.'

Captain Verschoyle being no longer under strict surveillance as an invalid, soon made the necessary arrange-

ments for going out. Hallett received his orders and departed for Shilston, laden with messages and instructions from Marshall, and two notes from his master, one to Lady Laura and the other to her hostess and cousin Miss Brocklehurst. Marshall hurried away to give all necessary instructions about the tea, and the brother and sister leisurely followed, pleasantly chatting together.

Audrey laughed incredulously at her brother's desire for home and quiet. 'Why, my dear Charlie, your state is really a most dangerous one. It would take very little to make you fall romantically in love with some charming creature (who of course would not have a penny), and to imagine you could spend the rest of your life lapped in the delights of domestic felicity and the luxuries which eight hundred pounds a-year would give you. Mamma's heiress will prove an interposition of Providence—she is just the girl for you to meet in a country house in your present frame of mind—she is so pale and fragile looking. Then, from having had every other want supplied, love is sure to be the one wish of her life; she will adore you, and you will gracefully consent to be worshipped; she will beg you to accept her fortune, calling it a cipher compared with the treasure you have given her in your love. And you will accept her fifty thousand pounds, and while pressing her to your heart, lament she is not penniless that you might show her your disinterested love is for herself alone.'

'Most dramatically drawn,' laughed Captain Verschoyle, 'and not altogether an unpleasing picture, for even now I should require little short of an angel to reconcile me

to love in a cottage on a limited income ; so may your foreshadowings prove true, sister of mine. Oh ! here is Marshall. I suppose we have reached our destination.'

They turned into an open gate, and followed Marshall into the house and up the stairs to an old-fashioned bow-windowed drawing-room, the ornaments of which seemed collected from every quarter of the globe. There were dangerous weapons of savage life, dainty carvings and grotesque josses, curious shells, gaudy feather flowers, cases of stuffed tropical birds, and rare China bowls and vases—all contrasting oddly with the well-worn carpet and somewhat over substantially made furniture. The table was set out for tea with whatever could be procured for an impromptu meal. Altogether the room looked quaint and homely, and quite different from anything Audrey had ever seen.

'I hope, Miss,' said the smiling, good-natured looking landlady, 'you'll try and make yourself comfortable, and ask for everything you want, and tell me all you don't like, and then we shall soon know each other's ways.'

'Thank you,' said Audrey ; then throwing herself into a chair, she exclaimed, 'For four days, farewell to all my greatness ! I intend forgetting the world and everybody it contains but you, Charlie, and we'll try and be like the prince and princess in the fairy tales, "as happy as the days are long."

CHAPTER III.

AT KING'S-HEART.



N quiet lives simple occurrences become great events ; and so it was that Dorothy Fox dwelt more than most girls might have done on the adventure of the day before. Naturally she desired to know if the handsome young soldier had quite recovered ; and this led to wondering where he lived, and whether she should ever see him again. Then the wounded arm spun a web entirely on its own account, telling its tale of Russians and Zouaves ; echoing the names Alma, Inkerman, Sebastopol ; names that recalled deeds, the fame of which could not be shut out even from the ears of the peace-loving Quaker. Notwithstanding all she had heard against fighting, a halo would throw itself over a wounded hero, and when she sat down to write her diurnal letter to her mother, it seemed a task to give a plain unvarnished statement of such an interesting circumstance. She determined, therefore, to tell her only

the facts that a young man had come into the shop, and had fainted, but that by Judith's care he recovered, and, after resting, was able to walk home. The details she would give to her mother when she returned. And as the return was to be on the following day, Dorothy employed herself in scanning the flower-beds, re-arranging the pots in the various stands, and redusting the already speckless furniture.

All was ready by the next evening, and six o'clock saw Dorothy standing in the garden, waiting to catch sound of the wheels which would tell her that old Rowe, with his white horse fly, was bringing the expected travellers slowly home. The sun had nearly lost its power, and twilight would soon gather slowly over the fair prospect. Already the distant hills were preparing to enshroud themselves in their blue misty coverings. Everything seemed hushed and peaceful, and the harmony between the low, ivy-covered house, the trim garden with its yew hedge screening the view of the high road, and the young girl in her grey, old-world dress, was complete. You might have fancied you had gone back to the days succeeding those when the first Charles held his court at a house close by, and had come to this very place to visit its loyal owner, 'who, in memory of the spot on which the king had stood, planted a yew tree, which he cut in fashion of a heart, and to this day King's-heart is the name the house goes by.'

Wheels! And this time, instead of going on, they come nearer and nearer, only stopping in front of the gate, which Dorothy quickly opens, feeling a desire to

throw her arms round her mother's neck and kiss her twenty times. But her father, she knows, would not approve of any such display of affection, so she stands quietly, with beaming eyes of love, waiting for them to descend. Then they exchange a quiet, sober, but warm greeting, and go into the house, quite ready to enjoy the substantial supper which Dorothy has provided for them.

When supper is over, the conversation flows more readily, although the two great points of interest—Elizabeth Spark's wedding, and Josiah Crewdson's visit—have to be deferred until Dorothy is alone with her mother. In the mean time she answers the questions relating to the household and the garden, tells them who she saw at meeting on First-day, and who gave the discourse ; and is in her turn informed of all that happened at Exeter during the stay her father and mother made there. Then they show her the presents they have brought home, and finding among them one for Judith, Dorothy runs off to look for her old nurse, who is waiting to see master and mistress, to give an account of all the proceedings of the Plymouth establishment during their absence.

Patience's eyes followed her daughter's retreating figure, and turning to her husband, she said—

‘ I have seen no one to compare with our child in sweetness since we have been away. I hope I am not too greatly set upon her, Nathaniel.’

‘ No, Patience, no,’ replied her husband, whose voice seemed always softer when he addressed his wife ; ‘ I believe thou hast towards her only the love of a fond mother—though,’ he added, smiling, ‘ certainly one of thy

greatest failings is letting thy love make thee somewhat blind to people's shortcomings.'

Patience gave an involuntary sigh, which, seeing her husband had noticed, she explained by saying, 'I feel such a shrinking when the thought that I may perhaps soon lose her comes across me.'

'Thou must not call giving her to Josiah Crewdson losing her, Patience,' replied Nathaniel, with a tinge of reproach in his look as well as in his voice. 'I only earnestly trust I may live to see her united to a man who, I believe, is worthy of her, and of being a champion in this cause of upholding our principles against those who, while they are Friends in name, are foes to the society they should defend and honour. I have more pleasure in looking forward to giving Dorothy to Josiah Crewdson, than I had to giving Grace to John Hanbury.'

'Dear Grace!' said Patience: 'I wish that she and John saw things more as thou would have them do; but I feel sure Grace never allows that in which her conscience condemns her.'

'Ah! the devil can make a conscience very elastic, Patience. Once let him get the smallest entrance into the heart, and he will soon fill it and the mind with a love of his snares and besetments.'

'I hope Dorothy may like Josiah,' said Patience, pursuing the subject which was uppermost in her mind.

'Of course, she will like him,' returned Nathaniel, growing impatient. 'Why should she not? An excellent young man, whom we have all known from his childhood. I trust that my daughter has been too well

brought up not to be greatly guided in her choice of a husband by the knowledge that he has the approbation of her father.' Then seeing a troubled expression on Patience's face, he patted her hand, saying, 'Be very sure, love will come, wife, love will come.'

'I trust so, for without it marriage must be a dreary bondage of mind and body. Two people may honour, obey, and respect each other, but if love is not present to make them one—oh ! husband, can you not say, "I pity them" ?'

Before Nathaniel could reply, Dorothy returned, asking if Judith might come in and see them. Permission being given, the old servant was soon interesting them in accounts of the orders Mark had taken, and how many times he had been away to Tavistock, Totnes, and other places.

After this Nathaniel went out to speak to the gardener, and then Judith entered upon gossip of a more domestic character, until, having exhausted her stock, she suddenly exclaimed, 'Did ye tell the mistress about the young soldier, dear, and his fainting off dead in the shop, just, as luck would have it, when I'd run out to tell Mary Dawe about Friday's cleaning ; such a woman as she is with her tongue, which once set clacking, and I'd like to see the one who'd get in a word on the blade of a knife. However, I was soon back, or I don't know what the poor child would have done.'

'Ah ! thou did mention something of the sort, Dorothy, but how did it happen, and what brought him to the shop ?'

Hereupon Judith and Dorothy related the whole cir-

cumstance. 'And, mother,' said Dorothy, 'Judith is quite offended with him because he took her for thee, and when he left desired his thanks and his card to be given to her.'

'Hush, now!' exclaimed Judith; 'it is too bad to bring that up against him. The truth is, his poor head was so dazed he couldn't tell cockles from corn.'

'I almost wish thou hadst heard where he lived,' remarked Patience, 'that Mark might have inquired whether he reached home in safety. These sudden attacks of faintness are very alarming. What was his name?'

'Captain Charles Egerton Verschoyle is on the card,' answered Dorothy.

'Oh! then he was not a working man,' replied her mother.

'Working man!' echoed Judith, 'indeed he had the bearing of a lord, and the step of a drum-major as he walked down the street. 'Twas his looks made me wonder what I'd best do with him.'

'I am glad thou let thy kind heart decide for thee, Judith,' said her mistress; 'the day must never come when any one, gentle or simple, in want or need, turns from Nathaniel Fox's door. Remember the spirit of true charity has dwelt in that house for many generations. But here comes thy father. It is time for reading, so call Lydia and Anne, and get the books, Dorothy.'

The maids came in, and the family, after sitting silent for a short time, listened attentively while Nathaniel Fox read the evening portion to them. To have merely

looked in upon such a scene would have sent a peaceful feeling over a troubled, world-weary life.

Although it was not quite dark the lamp was lighted and placed before the reader, thus making him the most striking object, and throwing out his face and figure Nathaniel Fox was a tall well-made man of nearly sixty years. His face was grave and almost stern in its expression. His disposition was naturally genial and cheerful, and he enjoyed a joke, or quick repartee, more than he would have cared to own. His family had belonged to the Society of Friends for many generations. His father had commenced life as a woollen-draper, and by his frugal habits and patient industry had so increased his business that he amassed a considerable fortune, which was inherited by his only son. Nathaniel had been sent to York school and kept there until he was fifteen, at which age he was considered to be duly educated and ready to learn the business. He never left home, settled early in life, and succeeded to a larger income than, with his quiet habits, he had any means or desire of spending. As time rolled on, his little peculiarities naturally became enlarged, his opinion that his own views were right became confirmed, and his toleration to those who differed from him got narrowed. Of the world he was literally ignorant, although by his warnings and exhortations against its snares and follies one might have fancied he had run the gauntlet of every temptation. So it was that this simple pure-minded man, to whom the truth was a law he never knowingly broke, took the most one-sided view of things which, if he could have seen them in their true light, he

would have upheld and enjoyed. No rigid fanatic ever stood by a dictum more staunchly than did Nathaniel Fox advocate every principle enjoined by the Society of Friends. The diminishing of the height of his collar, or the narrowing of the brim of his hat by one fraction of an inch would have been considered, by this worthy man, a grave offence. He never seemed to consider that though people might in most cases indulge in 'plainness of speech and behaviour,' without much personal inconvenience, plainness of dress entailed great trouble and expense. If Nathaniel wanted a hat or coat, he could not obtain such articles to his satisfaction in Plymouth; he had to apply to some maker for the brotherhood residing in Exeter or London. A new bonnet for Patience cost more trouble to obtain than any lady of fashion went through to secure the newest style from Paris. Still nothing would have induced Nathaniel to adopt any other dress than that which he had been brought up to consider as the only proper one for a consistent Friend. Certainly he had so far departed from the practice of his forefathers as not to insist upon mounting a cocked hat with the brim fastened up to the crown with cord; neither did he consider it incumbent upon him to confine himself entirely to drab. But his neck was ever enveloped in the whitest of cravats, tied with exquisite neatness, and his drab breeches and gaiters, as well as his black swallow-tailed straight-collared coat, were made of the finest West of England cloth.

Nathaniel had been married twice, his first wife having died soon after the birth of their daughter Grace, who, having mixed greatly with her mother's family, had formed

opinions and ideas which differed considerably from those held by her father.

Patience, his second wife, was the daughter of a wealthy tea-merchant of York. Her education had been more liberal than that of her husband, over whom she exercised a more decided sway than she ever named or he ever knew. They were very opposite in character and disposition, but their love to each other was devoted and unmistakable. From her mother, Dorothy inherited her fair face and delicate features. Patience had been a beauty, and those who knew her, thought she had lost but little of her charms. She was the friend of all around her, rejoicing in their happiness and prosperity, comforting them in sorrow and adversity, and giving to them in her own life a perfect example of each womanly grace and virtue.

CHAPTER IV.

A REUNION.

HE four days in Plymouth had slipped quickly away. To-morrow the brother and sister were to return to Shilston Hall and join Lady Laura, who was anxiously expecting her son. This was therefore Audrey's last day of freedom. They had made the most of the time, and it had passed away so speedily and happily, and left so many pleasant memories, that Audrey declared that if she could marry for love she would spend her honeymoon in Plymouth. Not that they had done much sight-seeing in a place where the lover of fair nature has but one complaint, an *embarras de richesses*. Captain Verschoyle, in after days, often spoke to her of that week at Plymouth, where she was as gay as a happy girl, and as artless and naïve as a thoughtless child. She would talk to the old boatmen, and listen with delight to their yarns, and would enter into conversation with any man, woman, or child

who chanced to come in her way, and be as triumphantly pleased with the evident admiration she excited in some rough old salt or military pensioner, as if they had been eligible *partis*, with rank and wealth to lay at the feet of their charmer.

'Audrey,' said Charles to her after one of these happy excursions, 'I have often heard that you were charming, but if people only saw you just now, they would say you were irresistible.'

Whereupon she made him a sweeping curtsey, declaring that she believed it, for it was the first compliment he had ever paid her in his life. 'But,' she went on, 'I have often thought that I might have been really nice, if I had not been brought up to show the right side, and feel the wrong side, of everything. The last few days have made me rather inclined to envy those whom ambition does not tempt to any other than a simple life of domestic contentment. It must be very pleasant to feel you have a companion for your whole life, one whom you love so well that you are truly content to take and be taken "for better and for worse." Ah, I see you are elevating your eyebrows, sir, and no wonder, when you are listening to such treason from the lips of your mentor. But pray don't inform against me. I promise to leave all my romance behind me here. And now, how shall we employ this last day?'

'I thought we should drive round Plymouth, and then I could make the inquiries I want to make at the Custom-house. I am rather anxious about those boxes ; they are filled with curiosities and relics that I set much value upon.'

Accordingly they set off, and soon found themselves going over the bridge and through the toll-gate, whose keeper had given Captain Verschoyle his round-about direction. The sight of the man reminded him of that evening's adventure, and he began to relate the circumstances to his sister. Audrey was quite interested in his description of the bright-looking, motherly shopkeeper, and her daughter, and asked him to give her a minute detail of all that happened.

'And the girl was very pretty?' said she, answering her brother with a question.

'Well,' replied Captain Verschoyle, 'I hardly know; her prim quaintness struck me so much more than anything else. Her *tout ensemble* certainly made a charming picture, but how much was due to her good looks I really cannot say. You know she was totally unlike anything I ever saw before.'

'How I should like to see her!' exclaimed Audrey. 'Could you not call, and say you were much better, and felt you could not leave Plymouth without again thanking them for their kindness?'

'Oh, I don't know,' said her brother, 'it's hardly worth while, and she might not strike you at all in the same way; *minus* crinoline and colours, you might think her dowdy and old-fashioned.'

'No, I should not,' answered Audrey; 'and if I did it would make no difference. My curiosity would be satisfied, so do go, Charlie. I really think you should, for they were very good to you.'

'Yes, they were indeed,' replied Captain Verschoyle

'Suppose I were to take a bunch of flowers to the girl. I saw some on the table, I remember; and you being with me, it would seem all right. I want them to think that I have come to *thank* them, not from any other motive.'

Upon this the coachman was told to stop at any shop where he saw flowers for sale. They had not left the Union Road before Audrey had selected a rather large bouquet formed of roses and lilies.

'I wish we could have got something better,' said Captain Verschoyle.

'Yes, I wish so too; but it will please them. Marshall would call it lovely—those sort of people always favour quantity rather than quality.'

They had soon passed St Andrew's Church and the Post-office, Audrey commenting on the smart shops and the gaily-dressed pedestrians, and admiring the pretty smiling girls, with their dark eyes and bright fresh complexions. The old Guildhall came in sight, and opposite it the fat gilt lamb dangling over the name of Nathaniel Fox, 'woollen draper and manufacturer.' Here they drew up and descended, and entering the shop, inquired if Mrs Fox were at home.

'Yes,' replied Mark, thinking the question applied to her return from Exeter.

'Could I see her?' said Captain Verschoyle.

'And Miss Fox?' put in Audrey.

'They're not here,' answered Mark; 'they're at King's-heart, where they keep house:' then seeing that Miss Verschoyle looked rather disappointed, he continued, 'But if thou came to see them thou wilt go on there

surely, or they'll be main disappointed. Now thou art on the road, 'tis but a step.'

'Yes; let us go, Charles,' said Audrey; and then seeing her brother hesitate, she addressed Mark, asking him if it was far, and begging him to repeat the name of the place.

'Perhaps you would explain it to the coachman,' she continued, 'for we are strangers here, and know nothing of the roads.'

Mark's explanation was very brief, for the man knew the house, and was soon driving up to it, Captain Verschoyle feeling very much inclined to turn back. But he was overruled by Audrey's curiosity; and as they had nothing else to do, and the country began to look very pretty, he soon felt more at ease.

At the top of the lane they got out of the fly, the man telling them to walk on until they came to a white gate, where they could either ring or walk in. The high hedge and the trees formed such a complete screen from the road that it was impossible to catch a glimpse of the house; and as they stood admiring the prospect Lydia answered their summons. She said Mrs Fox was at home, and bade them follow her. Somehow, before they had gone half way up the path, Captain Verschoyle heartily wished himself anywhere else. Audrey tried to whisper that they had certainly made a mistake, and they were both reflecting what they had better do, when Lydia opened a door, and announced Captain and Miss Verschoyle.

The room into which they were shown was always

called the sitting-room, though it answered to the drawing-room of upper middle-class families. It was prettily and lightly furnished, and bore about it evidence of being intended for home use, while the flowers arranged in different stands and vases spoke of refined taste and feminine influence. Patience was seated before a half-finished painting of a group of tall white lilies, giving Dorothy the benefit of her criticism, as the girl knelt at her side listening with delighted face to the praise her mother had to bestow.

When the door opened there was a momentary look of surprise on both their faces, and then Dorothy, coming forward with a perfectly natural but pretty shy manner, held out her hand to Captain Verschoyle, saying, 'I am so glad to see thee looking so well again.'

Poor Charles! I fear his first impulse was to turn round and soundly rate Audrey for allowing her curiosity to bring him into this dilemma. One glance at the occupants of the room told him the relationship in which they stood towards each other, and revealed the evident mistake he had made. He could not explain it now, and say that he had considered that homely-looking person the mother of this girl, who, among these surroundings, looked much more refined than he had in their first interview thought her.

'This is my mother,' continued Dorothy, as Patience advanced towards them.

Captain Verschoyle was not naturally oppressed with bashfulness or awkwardness, but on this occasion no youth raw from a remote country district could have felt

more confused. Audrey was so much amused at the appearance he presented, as he stood there trying to stammer out something, the enormous nosegay all the while in his hand, that it required a violent effort on her part to keep from bursting into a fit of laughter. But she restrained herself, and came to the rescue by saying—

‘Mrs Fox, you will pardon this intrusion, I am sure. My brother and I felt your kindness to him was so great, that our gratitude would not permit us to leave Plymouth without thanking you for it.’

‘I am very pleased to see thee,’ said Patience; then, turning to Captain Verschoyle, she continued, ‘The mistake thou madest in taking Judith for Dorothy’s mother was a natural one, and Judith is so valued by us all, that I appreciate the intention which made thee come so far to thank her, quite as much as if thy visit had been meant for myself.’

Patience little knew how her unstudied speech, prompted entirely by the wish to set the young man at ease, raised her at once in Miss Verschoyle’s opinion.

‘How well done!’ she thought; ‘that woman has breeding in her, though she may be the daughter of a thousand shopkeepers.’

Captain Verschoyle began to recover himself, and by the time Dorothy had relieved him of his floral burden, saying, ‘What beautiful lilies! I was wishing I had some more this morning,’ he had found his courage again; and feeling the truth had best be told, he said that he had got them for her, thinking that she lived in the town, and would perhaps accept them, and excuse the poorness of

his offering. They were soon perfectly at home, Patience listening to an account of Captain Verschoyle's subsequent illness, and Dorothy showing Audrey the flower painting she was engaged upon. Audrey thought she had never before seen anything so pretty as the child's artless manner, so self-possessed and yet so simple. She readily assented to Dorothy's proposal that they should go over the garden, and Captain Verschoyle and Patience got up to follow them.

'But,' said Audrey, 'you will get a hat or bonnet first.'

'Oh no; I never do.'

'Why, you will spoil your complexion; which would be a pity, for it is beautiful.'

'Is it?' answered Dorothy.

Audrey laughed; here certainly was a *rara avis*—a girl who was unconscious of the charms she possessed. Audrey wondered whether she was the happier for it, and if her whole demeanour could be relied upon. She was the embodiment of happiness, and yet what capabilities of improvement she possessed! If her hair were simply but fashionably arranged, and if she had an elegant white toilette, she would be the perfection of her style. And then Audrey mentally conjured up a reflection of her own figure clothed in grey, with the white net kerchief crossed over her bosom, and all her hair taken back from her face and fastened into a knot at the back of her head.

'I should look simply hideous,' she thought. 'What a providence I am not condemned to belong to the Quaker persuasion!'

'What art thou showing Audrey Verschoyle, dearest?

said Patience ; then seeing the surprised look on Audrey's face, she added, 'Thou must not think me familiar in thus naming thee, but it is against our principles to give persons the title of Miss or Mr.'

'Familiar ! indeed no, Mrs Fox ; I was just looking at this yew-tree so curiously cut.'

'Yes, they call it "Charles's heart," and say the poor man once stood by it in much sorrow. Dorothy will tell thee long histories of all he did during his stay at Widey, for he is her favourite hero of romance.'

'Hardly that, mother ; but I feel so sorry for him ; and so dost thou, too.'

'Yes,' answered Patience ; 'still I always blame him for want of truthfulness. He relied, I fear, on one of the world's supports—cunning, a very broken reed to all who try its strength.'

'Ah, but, Mrs Fox,' said Audrey, 'remember he lived in an atmosphere where, as in the world of the present day, a little deceit is pardonable, and strict truth would be not only unpalatable, but unwholesome, inasmuch as it would cause you to disagree with every one.'

'Thou dost not quite mean that,' replied Patience, 'or I should form a bad opinion of the world.'

'And do you not think badly of us?' questioned Audrey, laughing.

'I hope not,' returned Patience. 'Of course, thou must know that in the quiet life I lead, many of the things I hear I must condemn ; but then it is the folly I censure, not individually those who enter into it. How could I presume to do that, when, were it not for a good-

ness that has placed me beyond those particular temptations, my weak human nature might be as powerless to resist as theirs whom I should be censuring ?'

'Mrs Fox,' said Captain Verschoyle, 'you put a quiet life very pleasantly before us.'

'Do I ?' she answered ; 'and yet I sometimes hope that Dorothy may see more of the world than I have had an opportunity of seeing. I do not hold a choice made through ignorance so highly as I should hold one made after the person had in a measure tested the value of what was given up ; and just now a great agitation is working in the minds of Friends, whether it would not be expedient to give more freedom of action to members of the society. Many regard the movement with favour, while others cling to the customs of their fathers. My husband is one of those who deplore any innovation, so, of course, we carry out his views ; though I cannot say it would be against my conscience to do many things which I refrain from doing just because I know his conscience would condemn them. And now thou wilt come into the house and partake of some refreshment before starting ?'

Audrey hesitated.

'Oh, thou must come,' said Dorothy.

'I should like very much to do so,' answered Audrey, 'did I not fear we were almost trespassing on your hospitality.'

'Do not fear that,' said Patience, smiling. 'Thou knowest it is our custom only to say what we mean ; therefore thy staying will give us pleasure.'

'Then I am sure we will not deny ourselves such a pleasure,' added Captain Verschoyle.

And on this they all went back to the house to partake of tea and fruit and cake. They sat some time longer talking of paintings and flowers, and of many subjects on which Charles and Audrey seldom spoke. Captain Verschoyle gave them some descriptions of the Crimea—of the sufferings and bravery of the men, and of the fortitude with which some had heard their death-warrant, when life would have given them the fame to gain which they had risked all they held dear. He spoke more particularly of one of his own especial friends, and of the influence his life and death had had upon his men. Patience at length confessed to herself that she felt greatly drawn towards him, and thought how proud his mother must be of such a son ; for Charles Verschoyle had that gentle suavity of manner which, while it attracts all, particularly appeals to women who feel that their youth no longer claims the attention and thoughtfulness due to their sex.

They were all reluctant to say good-bye ; and, standing together at the white gate, any one would have been surprised to hear that they were friends of only a few hours' standing.

'Farewell,' said Patience to Audrey. 'I shall often think of thee.'

'And I of you,' she answered. 'The thought will do me good—as you yourself would do could I see more of you.' Then turning to Dorothy, and meeting her loving, earnest eyes, Audrey, giving way to a most unusual impulse, took the sweet face in both her hands, and kissed

her on both cheeks. Captain Verschoyle meanwhile bade a lingering adieu to Patience.

'Farewell,' she said ; 'I am glad we have met, should it never be our lot to meet again. In all thy warfare, may thou be protected.'

'Thank you heartily ; but I will not think this is to be our only meeting. Should I ever come to Plymouth again, you will, I know, give me permission to call and see you. Good-bye, Miss Fox, I have not expressed half my gratitude to you for your charitable kindness.'

One more look round to see the mother and daughter, as they stood together, the declining rays of the sun lingering about the pathway where they stood, and lovingly resting on them, and Audrey and Charles Verschoyle turned their faces towards Plymouth. The driver (who had been well cared for) touched up his horse, and they were soon well on the road again.

'Charles,' said Audrey, breaking the silence, 'I never in my life-time felt so old and world-worn, nor felt such a desire to be different from what I am. *Now* I know what happiness means ! Something born of a great heart—too pure, too truthful, too charitable to see aught but the best of people, and which, as it daily grows and strengthens, fills its owner with inward peace and perfect content ! Oh, I have so enjoyed this afternoon ! I feel, if I were a man, I should like to marry that girl.'

'And I,' answered her brother, 'should like to marry the mother. For such a wife I could give up everything, and feel perfectly contented.'

'Yes. she is certainly charming ; but so they both are,

and their manners are perfect. While I was watching them, I could but make some rather humiliating comparisons. Here was I pluming myself on my wonderful good breeding, the result of birth and society, and I come suddenly upon the wife and daughter of a country shopkeeper, who tell you that they have hardly ever been beyond the town they live in, and never mixed with other society than the members of their own community, and yet the self-possession and graceful tact of the mother, when she covered your confusion at an awkward mistake, by turning it at once into an attention paid to her family, and the pretty way in which the daughter told you that the flowers were just those she had been wishing for, might have been envied by a duchess.'

'Quite so,' said her brother; 'the true thing evidently springs from some other source than "blue blood" alone.'

'I was very nearly endangering every claim I possess to good breeding,' exclaimed Audrey. 'I really thought I must have had a fit of laughter at you, Charlie. You have no idea of the ridiculous figure you presented with that enormous nosegay; only the geese were wanting to make the representation of the "Bashful Swain" complete.'

Captain Verschoyle laughed. 'Well, certainly,' he said, 'I never felt more completely disconcerted in my life, and the worst of it was, I could think of nothing to say.'

'Fancy, Charlie, if mamma could have seen *her* son *hors de combat* before a shopkeeper's wife!'

'Ah! poor mamma!' replied Captain Verschoyle, 'she has a good many things to be shocked at yet.'

'I cannot think,' continued Audrey, 'why you were so little impressed with the girl's beauty ; to me she is lovely. She made me feel so old, and filled me with a desire to caress her and pet her and indulge her.'

'She *is* very much prettier than I thought her,' answered her brother ; 'before, I principally admired her quaint childishness.'

'Yes,' said Audrey, 'but that is only in her pretty half shy manner and appearance ; she can talk extremely well.'

'Can she?' replied Captain Verschoyle absently.

'Of course she can,' exclaimed Audrey, 'but you were so taken up with her mother that I don't believe you spoke ten words to her. However, it didn't matter, for I saw she admired me much more than she did you.'

'Then all was as it should be, and we got an equal division of pleasure. I wonder what the father is like.'

'Oh, vulgar, I dare say,' replied Audrey.

'And I *dare* say not,' returned her brother ; 'peculiar he may be, disagreeable perhaps, but the husband of that woman could not continue vulgar.'

'No, you are right, Charles,' answered Audrey, 'and I only wish I could see them often. I know they would do me good, and keep down that "envy, hatred, and malice" which poisons much of my better nature. This afternoon's visit is the delightful termination to our holiday. Say you have enjoyed the last week, Charlie dear, for I don't believe I was ever so happy in my life before.'

Next morning they took their departure reluctantly. Marshall quite entered into their regret, for, in addition to the scenery, she left behind the landlady's son, home from

sea, who, 'though a little free in speech and rough in voice, was a tender, kind-hearted creature.' Moreover, he was so attentive to 'Miss Marshall,' that she hardly knew what to think of his intentions. At parting he had given her a white satin heart-shaped pincushion, worked with beads, and had told her to accept it as emblematic, though his own heart was not so hard. So it had been a happy week to all of them, and as the train carried them beyond the possibility of another glimpse of the old town of Plymouth, they sighed that it was over.

Lady Laura was at St Thomas's station to meet them, and it rejoiced Captain Verschoyle's heart to see the tears of joy in his mother's eyes, and her contented look, as with her hand in his they drove to Shilston Hall.

'Miss Brocklehurst will be so pleased to see you both,' said Lady Laura. 'She has talked so much about you, that some of those horrid toadies of cousins have gone away in disgust. I am very glad now that Audrey went to you, Charlie, although I endured agonies after she had left, fearing that she might catch some fever or dreadful complaint. You know, my dearest boy, nothing but the certainty that it would have been death to me, in my weak state, to have gone to such a place prevented me flying to you. It was a dreadful trial to remain here. And it was so thoughtful of you to stay away these two days longer, and have all your clothes thoroughly exposed to the air. My anxiety for your return prevented my suggesting such a thing.'

'Do you intend staying here much longer, mamma?' interrupted Audrey.

'I think not,' answered Lady Laura. 'We are due at Dyne Court the beginning of next month, and I want to stay in town for a few days before we go there. However, Charles shall decide, and I shall be governed by him.'

'Oh no, mother,' said Captain Verschoyle, 'I do not want any of the bother of pre-eminence. You and Audrey must manage everything for me, and I shall be content to follow out any plans made for me.'

'Very well,' returned his mother, delightedly. 'If you throw the onus of management upon me, I think I may answer that you will have no cause for complaint. I have several pet schemes on hand which I think you will approve of, and before next season comes I hope you will both be well established, and independent of everybody.' At this point Lady Laura gave a sigh; and then, meeting her son's eyes, pressed his hand, exclaiming, 'I have not told you half what I suffered while you were away, nor how thankful I feel to have you with me once more.'

CHAPTER V.

THE CREWDSONS.



OSIAH CREWDSON was a cloth-merchant of Leeds, where for many years his family had held a good position, and were esteemed and respected by their fellow-townsmen. They adhered closely to the manners and customs of the sect to which they belonged. Josiah therefore wore the dress almost universally adopted by strict Friends. His coat, retaining its swallow tails, gave way a little in the matter of the old straight collar, which a lining of velvet, turned down, served partly to hide ; and instead of a white cravat, he adopted a scarf of black silk or satin ; but with these exceptions his costume was in all respects that of the old school.

In appearance Josiah was short and broad set, with ruddy whiskerless face, and an undue amount of colour, which seemed to deepen like a girl's on the smallest provocation. Had it not been for the excessive gravity of

his speech and manner, he would have struck people as boyish. And boyish his face really was, although his figure might have belonged to a middle-aged man. Except when engaged in business, Josiah was painfully shy, and very sensitive as to his own personal defects. He greatly envied the ease of manner and fluency of speech which most men seemed naturally to possess ; and he often wondered what could possibly make him so bashful and stupid. These two defects resulted entirely from the hard school in which his boyhood and youth had been passed.

His father, a stern, narrow-minded man, had certain fixed notions and plans on which he invariably acted, and for which he could give no better reason than that such was his rule. It was his rule, for instance, never to allow the smallest indulgence to his children, but to deny them every amusement. He punished each small offence, and magnified an omission into a glaring fault. He condemned all lightness of heart, and called all manifestation of tenderness nonsensical and ridiculous. His two daughters, who were many years older than Josiah, were cast in the same mould as their father. To them it was no hard task to obey regulations which exactly fitted in with their own cramped views.

But Josiah was not a Crewdson. He took after the mother, who had died when he was born ; and for this abominable want of sense the family never entirely forgave him.

Surrounded by all the comforts of life, the Crewdsons ought to have been a cheerful, happy family ; instead of

which they were dull and gloomy. The silence of a prison seemed to reign over them. They seldom met save at meals, where conversation was strictly forbidden. Except to ask for what they needed, not a voice was raised. Directly the business of eating was over, all the members were expected to occupy themselves immediately with their duties. Amusements were regarded as contemptible snares, which old Crewdson said were not needed by rational beings. If, therefore, Josiah, as a boy, interested himself in any little diversion which in the case of one differently brought up would have been extremely tame and uninteresting, Jemima or Kezia were down upon him, and if he did not at once relinquish his newly-found hobby, woe betide him. Thus was he kept in utter subjection ; his spirit curbed, his geniality suppressed, his tongue tied, and his whole nature turned, as it were, from its natural source and diverted into the groove which his father had laid down for it. And when old Crewdson died, people wondered why Josiah continued just the same man, permitting his two sisters to rule his household and lecture and snub him as they had done all his lifetime. They forgot that twenty-five years of brow-beating leaves such an amount of bashfulness and spiritlessness, that unless a man turn at once into a bully and a tyrant, many years will hardly suffice to remove it. In one thing Josiah's father had not laboured in vain, and that was to make his son a thorough man of business. Josiah's capacity for business was the only thing the old man appreciated in him. The lad soon saw that on this ground they met on an equal footing, that his diffidence

gave way, and his natural good sense had full swing. He showed such undoubted talent that for some years before his father's death the entire management had almost fallen into his hands, and the trade, which was very considerable, had steadily increased. * Josiah was accordingly looked upon as one of the wealthiest and most prosperous of the younger members belonging to the Society of Friends.

Between the Crewdsons and the Foxes there had always been a close intimacy, and it was the wish of Nathaniel Fox and old Stephen Crewdson, that this bond might be still further strengthened by the ultimate marriage of Dorothy and Josiah. Josiah had not seen Dorothy since she was a girl of fourteen. But even then he quite regarded her as his destined future wife ; and many people would have been somewhat surprised to know that this sedate-looking man, who was apparently engrossed in his business (for besides being a cloth merchant, he was a railway and bank director), looked forward with the greatest satisfaction to the time when a sweet young wife would lovingly greet his return and brighten his home, taking the place of the two gaunt figures, who, seated on the stiffest of horse-hair chairs, and clothed in the most terribly severe coloured alpacas, now considered it their duty to bear their testimony and uphold their principles whenever he proposed anything pleasant or a little contrary to their established customs. Yes, the fact was that Josiah's warm answers were often checked by the thought that very soon the whole domestic arrangements would be changed.

The proposed alliance between their brother and Dorothy Fox was of course no secret to the Miss Crewdsons. As it had been an arrangement of their father's, they entirely approved of it. In common with most of the leading Friends, they considered it an excellent and sensible union, and one which it was now almost high time to bring to a conclusion. Dorothy was nineteen, and twenty-one was considered a fitting age for a maiden to become a wife. Two years would thus be given for a more open engagement, and then the necessary preparation for settling would all be properly gone about ; for nothing done in haste could, according to the Crewdson ideas, be performed with that decency and order which befitted Friends.

The thought that it was high time these two young people should see a little more of each other had also entered Nathaniel Fox's head. Therefore it was fixed, after a consultation with his wife, that an invitation should be sent to Josiah, requesting him to spend a short time at Plymouth. Nathaniel said he knew his friend was too much occupied to make a long stay, but the more time he could give them the better pleased they should be.

Josiah readily accepted the invitation ; and it was with no little excitement that he was now looking forward to seeing his future wife. He began to arrange matters so that he might pay a visit to Exeter on the way, and be present at a wedding to which he had been invited, and which was about to take place between John Cash, his cousin, and Elizabeth Dymond, a relative of the Foxes. He knew Dorothy had been asked to assist as brides-

maid ; but no sooner had Nathaniel heard that Elizabeth was to be adorned in a white lace veil and an orange wreath, while her bridesmaids were to keep her company in coloured dresses and bonnets, than he sternly refused his consent to her going. He said he would as soon that his daughter should exhibit herself before a booth at Plymouth fair, as take part in such a raree-show.

Jemima and Kezia Crewdson of course were as severe in their censure. They told Josiah that he, too, ought to bear his testimony against such worldly wickedness by refusing to be present ; but a letter from Nathaniel, in which he begged Josiah to go, and seize the opportunity of rebuking the wedding party, had altered their tone. They now employed every moment they were with their brother in repeating to him the various remarks that had occurred to them as suitable for him to say, and which were calculated most effectually to damp all cheerfulness and hilarity.

Josiah, however, had not the slightest intention of saying one word of rebuke. He was too painfully alive to his own awkwardness and shyness to contemplate standing up before a number of people, many of them strangers to him, and delivering himself of a caustic speech. But as his habit was, he silently listened to all their conversation, not even indulging in a yes or no, unless absolutely compelled.

He was to start the next morning very early, so he sat attentively while Jemima, who had packed up his things, gave him the necessary information as to the reasons which had made her apparently collect together the most

incongruous assortment of material. It was rather amusing to see these two women regarding their business-like brother as utterly incapable. They had done so when he was a schoolboy, and so they did now. They packed his box for him, and they put up his parcels; but when Kezia commenced to give him various hints as to his mode of conduct towards Dorothy, it became too ridiculous, and Josiah was obliged to return her a mild re-proof.

‘Thank thee, Kezia, but, doubtless, when the time comes I shall find words to make myself agreeable to Dorothy.’

‘That speech is somewhat self-sufficient, Josiah,’ answered Jemima, immediately taking up the cudgels for her sister—‘a fault our father always ~~wanted~~ thee especially to guard against. Kezia’s remark was a just one; and Dorothy Fox, if she is what I take her to be, is too earnest an upholder of our principles to be caught by frivolous words and worldly phrases.’

Josiah knew that any answer would only draw him into an argument in which he was certain to come off worst, so he made no further comment, but promised to deliver all the messages he was charged with, particularly to tell Patience Fox that they would be pleased to have a visit from Dorothy, in order that they might become better acquainted. Then they bade him farewell, and hoped, grimly, that he would enjoy himself.

‘Thank thee,’ returned Josiah, ‘I think I shall. This is the first holiday I have had for so long that I shall do my best to make it pleasant.’

‘Well,’ said Jemima, with a gloomy nod of the head, ‘I wish it may turn out so.’

‘One would not give credit to thy wish by thy face,’ laughed Josiah, for the prospect of the change had raised his spirits, and made him unusually talkative and bold. The sisters looked at each other, as though they said, ‘If he was going to see the Foxes in this spirit, what will Dorothy think of him?’

‘There is one thing thou shouldst bear in mind, Josiah,’ said Kezia, looking with her most severe aspect; ‘and that is, that flippancy of speech leads to much error, and is against the principles thou hast been taught to obey.’

‘Yes; and it was a thing our father especially warned thee against,’ added Jemima. ‘I have often heard him say, that even a fool when he was silent was counted a wise man.’ With which flattering remark, Josiah was left to his own reflections.

CHAPTER VI.

HER LADYSHIP'S PLANS.



LADY LAURA VERSCHOYLE'S house was a small excrescence on a sort of by-way which connected a fashionable London square with a fashionable London street. Lady Laura always spoke of her house as 27, Egmont Street, which was true, only it would have been more correct to have said 27A, Egmont Street. The letter A seemed a very trifling addition, yet the difference that such a small sign indicated between the houses was somewhat startling ; for whereas No. 27, Egmont Street, would have been termed 'that desirable family mansion,' and was the town house of a baronet with £15,000 a-year, 27A, Egmont Street, would have been advertised as 'an elegant bijou residence,' and was the sole dwelling-place of Lady Laura Verschoyle, who on £1,500 a-year found it very difficult to compete with her more fortunate neighbours. Had she been contented to live on the other side

of the Park, she might have had a cheerful, comfortable house instead of this inconvenient one, where, to make a tolerably good reception-room, all the other apartments had been robbed of their height or breadth. 27A had a most cheerless prospect, the front being shadowed by the high garden wall of a grand house which looked into the Park. All the back windows were frosted over, that no glimpse might be caught of the mews into which they opened. Taking it as a whole, it would have been difficult to find a like rented abode with so little to recommend it besides what was to Lady Laura its all-powerful attraction—the fact of its being situated in one of the most fashionable localities of London.

The jesting, laughing, and quarrelling which Lady Laura could not help hearing from the back could not offend her so much when she remembered that it came from the grooms or coachmen of a marquis or an earl; and though the chief passers by were footmen, pages, or tradesmen's porters, they were all either going to or coming from some grand house, and so found more favour in Lady Laura's eyes than the fine stalwart sons and fresh pretty daughters of 'those middle-class people who are always trying to seem better than they are' would have done.

Lady Laura, with her son and daughter, had left Shilston Hall the day before, and arrived at her house in Egmont Street, intending to spend a few days there, and then go on to Dyne Court. The horses were turned out; the footman and housemaid were away on board wages, and only the cook (with her niece from the country) re-

mained of the usual household. The curtains had been all taken down, and the furniture covered up for the summer ; and as the family were only going to stay a short time, Lady Laura had not thought it necessary to have more than the dining-room got ready. They could manage, she said, without going to the expense of recalling the other servants. Certainly on this occasion, circumstances were very much against 27A, Egmont Street, looking the least like a house speaking of welcome and an invitation to settle down and enjoy the quiet pleasures of life.

So, at least, thought Captain Verschoyle as he descended rather earlier than cook had expected the morning after their arrival. The close heat and the active habits of the inhabitants of the Mews had driven sleep from his eyes at a very early hour, and he now somewhat ruefully surveyed the small uncomfortable room as the woman made as hasty a retreat as possible, apologizing for being so late, and promising breakfast as soon as it could be got ready.

'What an awfully dingy place this is !' thought he ; 'how can they exist here ? I don't wonder at that poor girl wanting to get married. Well ! I hope when I have a wife I shall have a better home than this ; although she must help to provide it, for I have not much more than half my mother's income. I shall certainly look after this heiress Audrey was speaking of, for money is a considerable sweetener of life.'

And then certain memories of his early days arose, when he had pictured a home and an angel to share it ; and he smiled over these visions, so dimmed now. In

books you might read of love's enduring through life ; poets spoke of its standing strong unto death ; but speaking from his own experience, he had never seen it stand out before an elder son or wealthier man. Several times he had been deceived into thinking he had secured a love pure and fresh enough to withstand all other temptations, but he had been rudely awakened from his dream to find that his successful rival possessed the real 'Open, sesame,' to all women's hearts—a rent-roll or a cheque-book.

So he began to resolve that he would try the barter system, and see how much money his good looks and name and position could bring him. An uncle had left him an income of £700 a year independent of his mother, but, as he often ruefully said, it was impossible for him to think of marrying upon that. No, no ; he would do as other men did. He would go in for money, and he might chance to get a nice girl, and if he didn't—why, she must go her way and he must go his. Then he jumped up suddenly and exclaimed, 'What a confounded nuisance poverty is ! I wish I was not such an extravagant fellow ; a good wife would be the saving of me, if she only loved me enough. She would soon make me ashamed of my selfishness, and I believe make me do anything to please her. I wonder why fate has never sent such a woman across my path ? I suppose there are such treasures in the world.'

Here his reflections were suddenly brought to an end by the entrance of his sister, who, hearing from Marshall that Captain Verschoyle was already in the dining-room,

came hurrying down in her morning wrapper to keep him company at breakfast.

'Accept, my dear Charlie, this tribute to fraternal affection—the sight of your beloved and admired sister *minus* the adornment of person substituted by the modern Briton for the woad of their ancestors.'

'I am delighted to see you under any circumstances,' said Captain Verschoyle, 'for I was just beginning to take a very rueful view of things in general.'

'Ah, now you have just spoilt your compliment,' laughed Audrey; 'had you stopped at circumstances I should have tapped you on the shoulder, after the fashion of the stage coquette, and cried "courtier;" as it is, romance has vanished, and I am merely regarded as a dispeller of "the blues." So ring the bell and we'll sit down to breakfast in the Darby and Joan style of every-day life.'

As soon as the servant had departed Audrey made a little *mouse* at the breakfast-table and said,—

'This does not look well after Shilston, does it?'

'No,' replied her brother; 'but what an awfully dismal place this is—so close and stuffy! Besides, I can hardly breathe.'

'Poor old Charlie!' exclaimed Audrey, 'it is too bad not to make home look its best to welcome you back. It is a most uncomfortable room, and just now it certainly looks its worst. Whenever I return from staying out, I always feel that we have the most inconvenient and the most dingy house in the world—a sham, my dear, like the part we play in life, and a hanger on to a grand locality, just as we are to our noble relations. Oh! when these

things grate on me and rub me up the wrong way, as they so often do, is it any wonder that I turn idolater and worship mammon ?'

'Well, no,' returned Captain Verschoyle. 'I feel with you. I do not believe either of us would shrink from good honest poverty, but it is the straining after what we cannot reach that frets one. I only wish that dear mother of ours would feel the same, and always say she cannot afford what really can give neither you nor her much pleasure.'

'Ah ! there it lies,' said Audrey. 'I have become so accustomed to deception that I sometimes ask, am I not cheating myself into an idea that I do not care for those very excitements which form the whole business of my life ? No, I can only be sure of one thing insuring happiness, and that is money ; and I intend to go to Dyne Court, armed to the teeth with charms to subdue its master, and come away only to return to it as its mistress --Mrs Richard Ford. An aristocratic name, is it not ? I hear mamma whispering to people, "An old Windsor family, mentioned, if you recollect, by Shakespeare." Let me see, Mrs Ford was a merry wife--hum ! But from the view I at present take of Mr Richard Ford, his wife will be a merry widow.'

Captain Verschoyle laughingly shook his head, saying, 'Come, it is too bad to be sending the old gentleman off into the other world before you have got possession of him in this one. But how about my heiress ? for I am thinking seriously of her ; it is quite time I got married, and as you seem to think her ladylike and tractable, I

will resign myself, and bid farewell to my early visions.'

'What were *they*?' inquired Audrey.

'Oh, a home reigned over by an ideal creature; who was too ethereal to care for more than I could give her, and earthly enough to love, with all her heart, a stupid, commonplace fellow like me.'

'You dear old creature!' said Audrey. '*Any* woman might be proud of you; so don't take such a very limited view of your mental and bodily advantages. Miss Selina Bingham will very readily listen to your suit, I am sure, as I should do if I had £50,000; but, being as I am, prudence would bid me take safety in flight from such a "braw wooer."

'Audrey,' said Captain Verschoyle, 'I wonder if you are as mercenary as you would have me think. One thing I do not believe, and that is, that you ever were in love.'

'No,' replied his sister, looking very serious. 'Among all the slings and arrows which outrageous fortune has aimed at me, a merciful Providence has defended me from Love's bow. I cannot say,' she continued, laughing, 'that I have not felt the scratch of the arrow as it glanced off; and, slight as the wound has always been, it has just given me an idea of the force with which it *could* come. This has made me look to my breastplate, that I might render it invulnerable. But that was years ago, and I am tolerably safe in my own strength now, and think that I could hold a successful siege against the most fascinating younger son in England.'

'Don't be too confident,' said her brother. 'Many a

stronghold that has stoutly prepared itself for a siege has been taken by storm.'

'My dear Charles, as your mother would say, do not be guilty of jesting on such a grave subject. *Apropos* of mamma, I have often thought over what line she would pursue if we were to marry poor nobodys. Of course, she would be furious, but I verily believe she would go about telling our friends that she was overjoyed, for she had always brought up her children to follow the dictates of their hearts.'

'Come, come,' replied Captain Verschoyle, 'you are too hard on the poor *mater*.'

'Indeed, I don't mean to be so,' said Audrey. 'But mamma, as a study, is perfect; she is so thorough in her cajolery. When I begin to be illusory I feel after a time that I should like to tell people the truth. My vanity wants to be gratified by showing how clever I am at deception. But it is not so with mamma. She believes in her fraud, and conveys it to others with such a semblance of truth, that sometimes even *I* am staggered. Don't look so shocked, Charlie, I do not mean to be undutiful; but this is the way I have been brought up. How can you expect me to have the faith which they say girls should have in their mothers, when the very first things I remember of mamma are, "Don't tell your papa such a thing," or "If Aunt Spencer asks you, you must say—" well—something quite opposed to the truth? However, it is mean of me to shelter myself under the cloak of my teaching; I ought rather to thank her for having given me this experience, so that if ever I have children, and

cannot gain their love, I'll try to gain their respect. And sometimes,' she added with a sigh, 'I think that is my last hope of being what I sometimes wish to be—a better woman. But, there, I really don't know—I am not worse than my neighbours; and with that very original and consolatory remark I will conclude my little speech, go and pay my *devoirs* to her ladyship, and take her maternal advice on the most becoming toilette to be worn at Dyne Court.'

She left, and Captain Verschoyle began to consider what he had to do in London, and what he should want in the country. He had sent Hallett off on a holiday, and therefore felt that he ought to be busy packing, only he did not quite see what he wanted. So he, too, wandered to his mother's room, to seek her advice, which on all matters of dress and adornment was unquestionably good.

Lady Laura admitted her son after a little hesitation and scrambling about the room. He found her at breakfast, the different chairs being covered with dresses of various kinds, with hats, bonnets, and mantles which Marshall was consulting her about, as to this trimming being altered, or those flowers changed, so that they might better accord with the fashion of the new additions to the wardrobe.

She motioned Captain Verschoyle into a chair, saying,—

'In one minute, my dear, I'll attend to you.'

Then, turning again to the maid, she went on with some final directions and suggestions, after which she dismissed

her, and threw herself back in her chair, saying in a piteous tone,—

‘Oh, my dear Charles, I devoutly hope this plan for Audrey will succeed, for it is getting more than my strength will bear to be constantly contriving that her dress shall appear as various and fresh as that of the girls we meet out. You know I should be dead to feeling did it not pain me to have her still on my hands. Considering the advantages and opportunities she has had, and the efforts I have made, it is *wonderful* to me that she is not married. When I look round and see the plain, commonplace girls (with mothers who have not seemed to care a pin who they talked to or danced with) married, and married well too, and all since Audrey came out—well! it only shows one that there must be some higher power than ours moving in such matters.’

‘She’ll get married yet, mother,’ answered her son. ‘I am certainly surprised at her being single still; but, perhaps, you have expected too much for her. Who is this man we’re going to visit now, and where did you meet him?’

‘We met him last Christmas at the Bouveries,’ replied her ladyship. ‘Audrey took part in some charades and tableaux they got up, and he so admired her, and paid her so much attention, that I quite thought he would have proposed then; but not being able to find out everything about him, I did not encourage him so much as I should now. He is quite a millionaire; and Dyne Court is a lovely place. He said then that he hoped we would come and see him in the summer, when this new place, which

he had recently bought, and which was then undergoing extensive alterations, would be ready ; and about six weeks since I had a letter begging me to fix *my* time, and he would then ask a few people to meet us.'

'So you thought that looked like business,' laughed her son.

'Coming from such a man, I did. He's quite one of those new people,' continued Lady Laura ; 'but so sensible—he couldn't at first believe that I was Audrey's mother. I have quite forgotten now how he made his money, but I dare say it was by brewing, or Manchester, perhaps ; and it's quite the fashion for good families to marry those sort of people, provided they are *very wealthy*.'

'But,' said Captain Verschoyle, 'he must be a great deal older than Audrey.'

'Well, yes, there *is* a difference certainly, still nothing to speak of. I almost wish he would wear a wig, for being so bald makes him look rather old. However, when they are married it won't make any difference, and if Audrey cared for him to look younger I should suggest the wig ; but I don't think she will trouble herself about him then, and he is certainly not older than Lord Totnes was, nor Lady Gwendoline Farnham's husband.'

'I hope he's presentable,' exclaimed Captain Verschoyle.

'Oh dear, yes !' answered his mother. 'Of course you must be prepared for the manner of the British merchant—honest and bluff ; but many people like that now. I remember Lord Tewkesbury saying that nothing

pleased him better. However, you will soon be able to judge for yourself. We shall leave on Thursday morning, and I hope we shall all enjoy our visit, for Audrey is not the only one I have formed plans for. The welfare of my children is always next my heart, my dear Charles ; and if I could see you both well married, with good establishments, such as your family and position entitle you to expect, I could sink into comparative insignificance, feeling that I had carried out and accomplished my work in life, and had not lived in vain.'

CHAPTER VII.

JOSIAH CREWDSON'S WOOING.



N every woman's breast is born the desire to captivate. It depends on her character whether or not this may develop itself into vanity. But in its early stage, when she is yet totally unacquainted with her own power, she views her charms with hopes and fears, and her great desire is that she may please. It was this which made Dorothy Fox linger over her adornment longer than was her habit on that afternoon when Josiah Crewdson was expected.

He was to arrive at five o'clock, and it was now past four, and time that she should join her mother, whose step she had heard descending the stairs fully ten minutes before. Yet Dorothy returned to the glass and gave herself another inspection. She was fully acquainted with her father's wishes, and knew the reason of this visit. The attentions she was bestowing on her appearance were therefore only the natural promptings of a woman's heart.

to look her best in the eyes of the man who is her lover ; for, except by name, Josiah Crewdson was almost unknown to her. She had hesitatingly asked her mother if she had not better put on her lavender silk dress, and Patience had accorded an immediate assent. Dorothy, therefore, in spite of grave colours and old-fashioned style, looked such a girl as the most fastidious man might feel pleased to let his eyes dwell upon. She certainly admired herself, and fearing that this feeling, which was not entirely new to her, might not be quite consistent, she hurried down-stairs to avoid further temptation.

Patience regarded her daughter with eyes full of motherly pride and love, and then the thought came of that someone they were expecting who would perhaps take her treasure from her. At this she repressed a little sigh, which made Dorothy declare that her mother had been over-exerting herself. Then she fetched her work and seated herself by her mother's side to wait Josiah's arrival. After a few minutes' silence, Patience's reverie was disturbed by Dorothy saying—

‘ I am glad Josiah was present at Elizabeth's wedding —it will be so nice to hear all about it. I do so wish father would have let me go.’

‘ I should have liked thee to be present, because it would have given thee pleasure,’ answered Patience ; ‘ and,’ she added, ‘ for that reason thy father would have desired it too ; the dress alone made him refuse thee.’

There was a pause, and then Dorothy said suddenly—

‘ Mother, I never thought our dress so ugly until I saw

Audrey Verschoyle. Oh ! I should like to wear clothes like those she had on. Was she not beautiful ?'

'No,' said Patience ; 'I did not think her beautiful. She was very graceful and elegant, and with a face which would make one say she had more goodness in her heart than in her mouth. She seemed to take a great fancy to thee.'

'Yes ; she said she wished we lived nearer one another, that she might often see me. I wish so too. Are people who are not Friends mostly like the Verschoyles, I wonder ?'

Patience laughed. 'That way of putting it is scarcely flattering to ourselves, dear,' she said ; 'though doubtless they who see various places and mix with various people gain a more agreeable manner and mode of expression than stay-at-home folks like us. She interested me greatly, although not so much as her brother did. What did thou think of him ?'

Dorothy felt vexed with herself because the foolish colour would mount into her face, and only for the reason that she had naturally thought a good deal of the handsome stranger. How could it be otherwise, indeed, when he was, in a way, the hero in the only event which had ever happened in the whole of her quiet life ? So without looking up she answered,—

'He was quite unlike any one I ever saw before. What a pity that he should be a soldier ! And yet, mother, dost thou know ? I am very fond of reading about soldiers and battles, for they have a kind of charm for me. I fear sometimes it is not quite right.'

Patience smiled at Dorothy's earnestness, for the at-

mosphere with which the girl was surrounded naturally had its effect upon her. Dorothy had been so entirely nurtured in the opinions of Friends that the slightest deviation into anything that they considered unallowable was looked upon by her as a failure in duty; and this erring on the right side, as Patience considered it, only caused her to feel greater anxiety that her daughter should see more of the world. For some time past she had been urging Nathaniel to give his consent to her paying a long-promised visit to her sister Grace in London, and afterwards going on to see her aunt Abigail at York.

‘I hope thou wilt have more opportunity given thee of seeing the world than I have had, Dorothy,’ she said. ‘Sometimes I am led to wonder whether our views are not a little narrowed by the small circle in which we move. Charles Verschoyle gave me much to reflect upon by his description of the late war. But I hear footsteps—it must be—yes, it is thy father. But where is Josiah Crewdson?’ she asked, addressing Nathaniel as he entered.

‘He is with me,’ answered Nathaniel; ‘only I have out-stepped him by coming through the back way to speak to James. Here he is,’ and Nathaniel, after allowing Patience to welcome their guest, took him by the arm and led him up to Dorothy, saying—

‘Dost thou recollect her?—this is Dorothy.’

Josiah thought he stood before the most beautiful creature he had ever seen in his life, and all the speech which, on his way from Exeter, he had been concocting,

and which had seemed to flow more glibly each time he had repeated it to himself, suddenly died away ; and all his nervous shyness, which he hoped he had left behind him at Leeds, seemed to rush back upon him, and he could only take Dorothy's stretched-out hand and stammer,—

‘ Oh ! indeed. How art thou ? ’

Dorothy answered, that she was quite well, and hoped he was the same ; and then Josiah sat down in the most uncomfortable position on the nearest chair, and furtively glanced again at Dorothy, who, in order to give him time to recover himself, looked steadily in another direction.

Patience asked him several questions relating to his journey, until Nathaniel, finding it was within half-an-hour of dinner-time, suggested that Josiah had better be shown to his room. He and Patience went off with him, and Dorothy was left alone.

As soon as they were out of the room, Dorothy's face assumed a very blank expression. Oh, how different Josiah was from what she had thought ! Not a bit the same. He was so plain—and quite fat—not the least like the man she expected to meet. Poor Josiah certainly suffered very much by comparison with a figure which had for the last few weeks moved pretty constantly in Dorothy's imagination. Quite unknown as it was to herself, I doubt much if she would have been so painfully struck with Josiah's appearance had Fate decreed that they should meet before her adventure with Captain Verschoyle. But since that time, he had formed the type of the romance hero to her—her ideal of a lover ;

whilst Josiah's light eyes and whiskerless face presented a sorry contrast to this standard of personal perfection.

She was still ruefully contemplating her disappointment, when the door opened, and the object of her thoughts, having completed his somewhat hasty toilette, entered the room. He had made up his mind to shake off his ridiculous nervousness this time, and to plunge headlong into any topic which presented itself. But with the exception of that never-failing resource, the weather, not an idea would come at his bidding. So he said that it was 'very warm, but seasonable ;' and this happy remark being agreed to, a silence ensued. Then Dorothy remembered that she was not quite consistently filling her post as hostess, and that it was incumbent upon her to exert herself ; and this she did with such purpose, that Josiah became more at his ease, and could manage to give other than monosyllabic answers to the questions put to him. The wedding, of course, proved a delightful theme for conversation, and by the time that Dorothy had laughed over his description of Elizabeth's white stuff dress and gauze veil, Josiah plucked up courage sufficient to tell her how much more he should have enjoyed it had she been there.

'Elizabeth told me to tell thee, that she missed thy face every time she looked at her bridesmaids,' said Josiah.

'Dear Elizabeth,' said Dorothy, her eyes filling with tears, 'she is always so kind. Did she not look very pretty ?'

But Josiah was too lost in admiration of the speaker's own sweet face to attend to her words.

‘Eh?’ said Dorothy.

‘What!’ replied Josiah.

‘Did not Elizabeth look very pretty? I asked thee,’ returned Dorothy, hardly able to refrain from laughing at his fixed gaze.

‘Pretty! oh, yes,’ hastily answered Josiah, brought to a sense of his absent manner and open-mouthed stare, ‘but I was thinking of thee; she did not look like thee.’

Here Dorothy laughed outright, declaring that he was keeping to that plainness of speech enjoined upon them. On this Josiah tried to defend and explain himself, but to no purpose—she would not listen. So, when Nathaniel and Patience returned, all restraint seemed to have vanished, the two having apparently placed themselves on a perfectly familiar footing. Still, before the evening was over, each one felt that entertaining Josiah was no light task. At dinner, do what they could, it was impossible to draw him into conversation. Nathaniel quite approved of children being brought up as the Crewdsons had been—to hold their tongues at meals and listen to their elders,—but when people arrived at years of discretion it was only fit that this restraint should be set aside. It was just as well to make the time pass pleasantly. But in the Crewdson household the rule of silence still held good, so that though Josiah made the effort, he found it impossible. When his plate was set before him, he could not do anything but eat up its contents as quickly as possible. Then he felt so awkward under the impression of watching every mouthful the others ate, that he had one helping after another, until Dorothy decided that he had

the most enormous appetite of any one she had ever seen. No ale or wine being drunk at dinner, coffee was served immediately afterwards, and they all adjourned to the drawing-room. Here Josiah went through another trial between his wish to assist Dorothy, who was seated at the table pouring out the coffee, and his fear lest he might by some awkwardness or other make himself ridiculous in her eyes. So it ended by his sitting on the very edge of his chair, and starting up like a Jack-in-the-box every time that Dorothy moved to hand the cup to any one. At last, Patience, taking pity on his evident bashfulness, said to him,—

‘If thou wert to sit at the table, Josiah, thou might perhaps assist Dorothy.’

After the coffee was cleared away, Nathaniel, with the view of bringing the two together (notwithstanding that he gave himself a wonderful stretch indicative of relief as soon as their backs were turned), proposed that Dorothy should show Josiah the garden. This was just what Josiah had been wishing for. But the moment he was alone with her he found he could not say a word. So Dorothy had to take the initiative, and tell him the names of the flowers, and show him ‘The King’s-heart’ yew-tree.

During all this time poor Josiah gazed his heart away, so that he lay awake for hours that night recalling all that she had said and done—his own already humble opinion of himself dwindling into nothing as in the quiet of his own fancy he magnified all her charms.

Naturally, the newly-arrived guest was freely discussed by the whole household, who unanimously decided that

he wasn't at all the man for Miss Dorothy, of whom everybody said that she was a real beauty, more like a picture than a Quaker. Judith, who in her anxiety to see her dear child's future husband had come out that same evening from Plymouth, was highly indignant at the master for contemplating such a match. She expressed her opinions so plainly, that Dorothy had to take up the defence of Josiah, whom Judith in her wrath had that moment called a calf-faced jolter-head.

'Oh, Judith!' replied Dorothy, reprovingly. 'It is wrong of thee to speak so of one whom father thinks so worthy.'

'Worthy!' echoed Judith scornfully. 'Worthy of bein' ducked for having the impudence to think of you, child, when every day you're growin' more sweet.'

'What is all this about?' said Patience, who had entered unobserved.

Judith, who stood somewhat in awe of her gentle mistress, looked a little confused as she answered apologetically,—

'It's only me, mistress, lettin' my feelin's roughen my tongue, and they both run on a good deal too fast; but Mr Crewdson isn't the man at all I expected to see.'

'No?' said Patience, looking rather grave; 'but we must not be too hasty in our judgments, Judith.'

'I think when he is more accustomed to us, we shall like him better,' put in Dorothy; 'he is so shy now.'

'He is not accustomed to strangers,' said Patience; 'and thy father tells me old Stephen Crewdson was a stern man, and kept his children in great fear of him.'

So doubtless Josiah will improve now he is his own master.'

Having said this, Patience put her arm round Dorothy and drew her into her own room, thinking that the girl might tell her more definitely her impressions of her future husband. But Dorothy changed the subject, and talked about their projected excursions, until Nathaniel's step was heard upon the stairs. Then she bade her mother good-night ; and when she was alone wondered if she should ever get to like Josiah. She was very disappointed in him, certainly ; yet there seemed something nice about him. How odd it seemed to think that he might be her husband ! Then she fell asleep, and her dreams ran on weddings : and she, dressed like Elizabeth Cash, stood a bride with Josiah at her side, only, instead of being like himself, he was like Charles Verschoyle. And when she awoke she thought what stupid nonsense comes into one's head in dreams.

The whole of the following week was devoted to showing Josiah the beauties of the neighbourhood. Dorothy thoroughly enjoyed each day. She felt no restraint before Josiah now, and would run up and down the hills laughing at him ; while he, panting and puffing, seemed to gain each summit by the sweat of his brow. He had never yet found courage enough to tell Dorothy of his love for her, which hour by hour he felt growing stronger. He had made two or three attempts, but she had always misinterpreted his speech, or turned it into fun ; and the slightest damper effectually put a stop to this bashful wooing. But now the last day had come, for he was to

leave them the next morning. So Josiah was unusually silent, feeling that he ought to say something, and that Nathaniel would expect it of him. But how to say it while she was asking him questions and telling him stories about things so entirely removed from the subject he had at heart, he did not know. Still this was almost his last chance, for after their return from the Castle Hill they were to rejoin Patience and Nathaniel. In the midst of Dorothy's speculations, then, as to the different appearance the place presented now from what it did in the olden time, when it had been the constant scene of bloodshed and warfare—for this afternoon all was so peaceful and calm, that it was a fitting place for merry boys and girls to play and make sweet echo with their gleeful voices—Josiah suddenly burst out with,—

‘Dorothy, I do love you. I am so fond, that is—O Dorothy! dost thou like me?’

Dorothy looked up rather startled at this abrupt diversion; but none of that confusion or bashfulness, which a girl feels when she first discovers that she is loved by the man she loves, either stirred her nature or showed itself in her manner as she answered with assumed gravity, hiding a smile which lurked about the corners of her mouth,—

‘Like thee, Josiah? oh, yes. Are we not told to love all men as brothers?’

There was a pause. Then Dorothy looked up, and her eyes meeting his, he said, *his* face instead of Dorothy's growing scarlet,—

‘But, Dorothy, thou art so beautiful.’

‘Oh ! Josiah, how canst thou !’ exclaimed Dorothy in a tone of rebuke. ‘Remember, “Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain,” and we ought to bear our testimony against vanity of personal looks. I wonder at thee ;’ and Dorothy glanced with a greater degree of complacency towards Josiah, and an increased desire to know what he had to say to her. But these two answers had completely overwhelmed Josiah, whose small stock of eloquence immediately forsook him. The teaching he had so long received, to the effect that whenever he was going to act on his own impulses he was certain to make himself ridiculous, now took possession of him. He had only stammered and stuttered out something about their two fathers having intended that they should like each other, and that he was such an awkward sort of fellow, when they met Patience and Nathaniel. The missionary meeting being held that night at King’s-heart, no other opportunity presented itself. But before Josiah and Dorothy said good-night, he whispered to her,—

‘Dorothy, thou wilt try and like me ?’

‘Try ?’ she said laughingly ; ‘I tell thee I do like thee.’ She ran up-stairs, but turned round when she reached the top ; and, finding that Josiah still stood looking after her, she nodded and laughed the more, thinking ‘what a funny face he has when he looks like that,’ which meant that a despairing expression did not suit poor Josiah’s commonplace countenance. Charles Verschoyle would have expressed his feelings by a look which would have touched the heart of the coldest woman ; Josiah, although actuated by quite as fine feelings, could only produce

laughter in the woman the smallest dole of whose love he was longing to possess.

Josiah and Nathaniel had some conversation that evening respecting Dorothy. All Josiah could say was, that Dorothy had said she liked him.

‘Well, I think that is as much as thou canst expect at once,’ replied Nathaniel, encouragingly. ‘Women are always rather shy about their feelings, but thou must come again, and then we shall doubtless be able to settle everything. Take heart, Josiah ; Dorothy is her father’s child, and where she says she likes, doubtless she means to love.’

CHAPTER VII

LIKING AND LOVING.



HE next morning Josiah left King's-heart. Patience and Dorothy stood with him in the garden waiting for Nathaniel, who was to accompany him as far as Plymouth.

'Now thou hast found thy way here,' said Patience, 'thou must come again; we shall always be glad to see thee.'

Josiah gave her a grateful look for this welcome invitation.

'I shall be only too ready to come,' he replied. 'I am so sorry to leave. I never enjoyed a week so much in all my life—thou hast been so good to me.'

And then he turned to Dorothy; but though he wished to tell her how sorry he was to leave her, and how he should long to see her again, he found it was impossible. Every time he tried to speak, his heart seemed to leap into his throat and choke the words. No such incon-

venience, however, oppressed Dorothy, who looked smilingly into his face as she said,—

‘Oh yes ; thou must come in the summer, and then we can go to the Mew Stone and to Cothele.’

But Josiah was not heeding a word she said. He was entirely occupied with wondering whether he might give her a kiss when he said farewell. She was in a way engaged to him, at least he had her father’s consent, and she had promised to try and care for him, and he thought he would ; but at that moment Nathaniel appeared, calling out to him,—

‘Come, Josiah, we’ve no time to spare ; say farewell and jump in.’

He thought he had better not venture anything of the sort ; so he shook hands with Patience, turned again to Dorothy, changed his mind, and made such a sudden dash towards her that she only seemed to get a knock on her nose. Before she recovered from her surprise, Josiah was seated in the carriage, too excited, and his face too red, to see Dorothy’s look of bewildered astonishment. But as they drove off, the true purport of this sudden movement dawned upon her, and, unchecked by her mother’s reprobating look, she burst into a fit of laughter.

Patience was very anxious to have a serious conversation with her daughter on the subject of this proposed engagement with Josiah. She liked him, and believed he had a great deal of goodness in his nature ; but she saw he was no more fitted for a husband for Dorothy, than Mark or Samuel their shopmen. Dorothy, in spite of the quiet sober way in which she had been brought up, pos-

sessed a vivid imagination, a quick sense of the ridiculous, and such warm feelings as were certain to influence her life and mould her character. There was much about her that Josiah, in spite of all the love he might feel for her, would never understand. As a child, obstinacy had been her greatest fault. This defect time and training had turned into firmness. Seldom shown, because few opportunities presented themselves for its display, but lying dormant in the young girl's heart, was a will indomitable as her father's, a tenacity of purpose which, after she had once taken a resolution, would overcome most obstacles.

Patience had thoroughly studied her daughter's character, and felt convinced that to allow such a nature to ignorantly take any irretrievable step in life would be a failure in parental duty. She therefore determined that after speaking to Dorothy she would tell her husband of the thoughts which troubled her, and beg him to let their child go on a visit to her sister, and thus see a little more of society than their limited circle afforded.

The morning passed without Dorothy making any comment on Josiah or his visit. After luncheon, the mother and daughter sat down together with their work, each one silent and apparently occupied with her own thoughts ; at last Dorothy said,—

‘ Mother, wert thou ever in love ? ’

‘ Yes,’ answered Patience.

‘ Then tell me what it is like.’

Before Patience attempted to answer Dorothy's question, she sat for some minutes communing with herself.

‘ Dorothy,’ she said at length, ‘ thou hast asked a very

puzzling question, and one that I shall find it difficult to answer to my own satisfaction, for love takes such various shapes in various natures, that by our own heart we can never truly judge the hearts of others. But first thou must be open with me, and tell me what makes thee ask this question.'

Dorothy's colour came, as with a slight hesitation she answered,—

'I think—that is, I know—that father and thou have always wished me to like Josiah Crewdson ; and now that I have seen him, and know him better, I do like him, and think him very kind and worthy, but—surely, mother, something more than liking is needed to make people happy ? '

'Indeed, yes, my child, and that is what I wish to explain to thee. Love is apart from all this ; it is the charm which makes us tender to failings, not blind to them. Every merit we see in those we love we rejoice over. Love is something so powerful, deep, and binding, that, though it is impossible to define it, it is known to be love the moment it is felt.'

'But does all this come at once, mother ? '

'No ; I think in most cases it does not, but I am speaking of what in some degree thou should experience before thy consent is given to be the wife of any man. Doubtless, love often grows, but I think when I was thy age I could have felt tolerably certain who might excite such feelings within me, and who never would.'

Dorothy's face crimsoned. The thought flashed across her, supposing Charles Verschoyle had been Josiah Crewd-

son, would she have needed to ask these questions? Not that Dorothy was one atom in love with the stranger who had come among them so unexpectedly, and whom she most probably would never see again, but he satisfied her imagination, and Josiah did not.

‘Mother,’ she said abruptly, ‘dost thou think I shall ever love Josiah Crewdson?’

‘That is hardly a fair question,’ answered Patience, not wishing to give a straightforward No, which would have been her real opinion. ‘I see nothing about Josiah to prevent a woman caring for him; he is very good-tempered and estimable, and his little awkwardnesses result only from shyness,—he would very soon overcome them.’

‘But I do wish he was not so fat, and short, and funny-looking.’

‘We must not fall into the habit of being caught by externals,’ said Patience. ‘It is only natural, dear, that thou shouldst admire good looks; but thou wilt never care less, I trust, for people who have not that gift. I have been wanting to speak to thee before I ask thy father’s permission for thee to go on a visit to Grace. I think after thou hast mixed a little more in the world thou wilt know thyself better.’

Dorothy was delighted at the idea; her only fear was that her father might not consent to her going to a sister whose views were opposed to many of their own. But Patience undertook to speak to him first, and to tell him her wishes, and the reasons she had for believing that they would be acting consistently in allowing Dorothy to accept Grace’s invitation.

'That night, after reading was over, and when the husband and wife were left alone, Patience commenced her task, which at the outset Nathaniel listened to very impatiently. Josiah, he said, was a very worthy young man ; and if he did not speak every time he got an opportunity, he never spoke when he might better have held his tongue. For his part he did not see what more they could want for their daughter than an excellent husband, with a good fortune and a flourishing business.

'But,' said Patience, 'that is all very well if she cared for the man.'

'Now that is one of thy woman's fancies and arguments, Patience,' replied Nathaniel. 'Leave her alone and she *will* care for the man. What other man can she care for ? Who does she see unless it is Andrew Dymond or Jabez Smith ? and compared with them Josiah has the graces of a posture-master. When they are once married they will get on very well ; as I have often told thee, love will come. Still, I have no wish to force the child into a marriage which is distasteful to her ; though, should she decide against becoming the wife of Josiah Crewdson, she wouldst crush one of the wishes nearest my heart.'

'But thou would sacrifice thy wish, dear, if its accomplishment failed to give Dorothy happiness ?'

Nathaniel gave a vexed movement, which Patience noticed, and drawing her chair nearer to her husband, she laid her hand on his, saying, 'Wilt thou listen to me for a few minutes ?'

Nathaniel nodded assent.

'Well then, first, be assured that I like Josiah, and that

I should be perfectly contented to see Dorothy his wife, but I do not consider he is calculated to make her happy ; and she has had so little opportunity of comparing him with others, that we are not acting up to our duty if we allow her to make a blind choice. There might come a time when her heart would reproach us. Though Grace has many views that we condemn, yet we know that Dorothy may be safely trusted to her care, without any of her principles being tampered with. Then why not let her go on a visit to Grace, with permission to mix in their home circle, and in any amusement which she feels we should not forbid ?

‘And when she returns home, how then ?’ asked Nathaniel. ‘Will she not be discontented ?’

‘No, I can answer for that ; and if then she makes no objection to Josiah, be assured, Nathaniel, I shall raise none.’

‘I do not see the necessity,’ said Nathaniel ; ‘nevertheless, I will think the matter over, and by to-morrow, perhaps, give thee my decision.’

The next morning he asked Dorothy to walk round the garden with him, and after a time he said,—

‘Well, Dorothy, and what dost thou think of Josiah Crewdson ?’

‘I like him ; he is exceedingly good, well-meaning, and worthy.’

‘Very excellent qualities in a husband, Dorothy.’

‘Yes, father—but,’ she added as the colour mounted to her cheeks, ‘I should want to know him much better before that.’

‘Certainly, child ; certainly. Still thou hast no positive distaste to him?’

‘No ; on the contrary, I think very highly of him.’

‘Yet thy mother tells me thou hast a wish to spend some time with Grace?’

‘Yes,’ replied Dorothy ; ‘but I do not know that that has much to do with Josiah, for I wished it quite as much before I saw him.’

‘Then thou hast my permission to go,’ said Nathaniel, greatly relieved by this last remark of his daughter. ‘I know I can trust thee to uphold thy principles in all thy actions, not entering into anything which thy conscience does not approve as consistent. From Fryston thou must go on to see Aunt Abigail ; and while thou art so near, what dost thou say to accepting this invitation from the Crewdsons?’

‘If it will not be staying away too long from thee and mother, I should like it,’ said Dorothy, her face beaming with pleasurable anticipation.

‘No,’ replied her father ; ‘we must learn little by little to try and do without thee ; no easy task when the time comes,’ he added, patting her head lovingly.

The tears sprang to the girl’s eyes as she exclaimed—

‘Oh, father, I never want to leave thee ! I do not care to go now. Let me stay at home.’

‘No, my child. I am very glad, as things seem to be turning out, that thou art going. I shall write to Grace, and tell her thy mother will take thee ; and, as I have some business in London the week after next, I will go and bring her home.’

During the next few days nothing was thought of but the preparations necessary for their journey. At last the morning for starting arrived, and Nathaniel accompanied them to the station. Grace was to meet them at Paddington, so that they should not have any trouble ; for to Patience a journey alone was an undertaking.

As they stood waiting for the train to come up Nathaniel could not help noticing the attention which Dorothy attracted. She was looking all the more beautiful from the excitement, which made her eyes sparkle and her colour brighten more than usual. Her fair youthfulness seemed to strike Nathaniel afresh, and he anxiously thought to himself whether he was right in letting her go from him. What if she should attract the attention of some vicious worldling, whose fair words and specious reasoning might entangle her young fancy ! And this fear made him walk to the old house opposite the Guild-hall with a more measured step and graver face than usual ; and during the whole of the day he continually said to himself, 'I fear I have not acted wisely in letting her go.'

CHAPTER IX.

AT DYNE COURT.

DYNE,' says an old chronicler, 'was the king's demesne at the Conquest, the chief house whereof adjoined the abbey (now demolished), and in times past hath been notable for that Hieretha, canonized a saint, was here born ; esteemed to be of such sanctity that you may read of many miracles ascribed to her holiness, in *his* book who penned her *life*. This dwelling-place of Dyne Court and lands, which the family of Montague enjoyed, from the time of King Henry I. even unto King Henry VII.'s days, came unto the Chichesters by the marriage of Margaret, sole daughter of the house, with Geoffrey Chichester, who took the name of Dynecourt, by which honourable name this family hath ever since been known.'

Known at the Court of the virgin queen as grave and reliable advisers ; known to have laid down life and lands for the martyr Charles ; known at his son's gay revels as

roistering gallants ; known as the friends of each wanderer of the house of Stuart ; known as men who were eyed with suspicion by the house of Hanover, until, their fortune gone, and their lands mortgaged, they died out of royal memories,—the last three generations of Dynecourts had been known only to those who dwelt near as men who had nothing to bequeath but their ancient name and ruined house. These had descended some few years before to one who, in his turn, was known to the neighbourhood as that Dynecourt who, sick of trying to stave off the evil day, had summoned up courage enough to look into his condition, and had sold the old place which he could not keep from falling into ruin. He had paid off the debts still clinging round it, and had acknowledged himself all but beggared, and forced to earn his own living.

So the descendant of all the Dynecourts—the friends of kings and boon companions of princes, successful lovers of court beauties, and husbands of titled dames—now toiled in the law courts as a barrister ; while Mr Richard Ford, whose father had been a porter, and he himself an errand-boy, was the owner of the fair lands of Dyne Court. When Richard Ford was yet a boy in a fustian suit, with a heavy basket on his arm, he never passed Temple Bar, or the Tower, or any old building, without being compelled to stop and gaze upon it. Though he knew not why, his gazing brought him pleasure ; and as he advanced in age and social position, he became a humble collector of curiosities, and when he grew rich he found he possessed an antiquarian taste. His search for a seat had therefore been guided by this dilettanteism : the house must have a his-

tory, its surroundings must have an interest. Directly Dyne Court was in the market he went down to it. He longed to call the place his own from the moment he saw the quaint village with the old-fashioned inn—‘The Swan with Three Necks,’ stretching its sign across the street. His desire was only increased by the sight of ‘the fair church and its stately tower,’ by the rough stone bridge, before the building of which ‘the breadth and roughness of the river was such as it put many lives in jeopardy, until the pious Dynecourt—Fulk Dynecourt—was admonished by a vision to set on the foundation of a bridge near a rock which he should find rolled from the higher grounds upon the strand, and in the morning he found a rock there fixed, which incited him to set forwards so charitable a work and build the bridge now to be seen.’ And when, after crossing the bridge, Mr Ford stood in front of the large iron gates, and saw, half-way up the avenue, the Gothic arch (trace of the abbey which once stood on that spot), he firmly determined that if money could do it, he would be master of Dyne Court.

And now he was master of it. Ever since that time, Dyne had been noisy with labourers and tradesmen, putting the whole place in thorough repair, but without altering its exterior. Mr Ford himself vigilantly watched over the work. The interior arrangements of furnishing and decorating he committed to the hands of ‘a great London authority ;’ and at the present time all who had seen it declared everything to be perfect. It took one a long time to get conversant with all the traditions and histories of ‘the Court lands ;’ and when Mr Ford, with natural

pride of heart, showed any guests over them, he played a very secondary part to Roger Cross, who regarded his office of head gardener as one of hereditary distinction, it having been (as he informed them) in his family for two hundred years. Roger did not attempt to conceal his feelings at the bitter change which had overtaken the fortunes of his old masters ; and after pointing out the spot where the duel took place, in which Charteray Dyne-court fell by his friend the Earl of Hereford's hand, or the gate which had never been opened since Maud Dyne-court shamed the family by taking flight through it with one of 'Oliver's Lords,' forsaking her denounced Cavalier lover, he would shrug his shoulders and shake his head, saying—

'But times is changed with us since then, ladies and gentlemen.'

Then there was the Well, where all true lovers went to swear their constancy and pledge each other in the water, which secured them the good-will of St Hicretha. There was many an avenue, too, where belles in sacques and hoops and farthingales—whose names are still famous—walked and coquettled with beaux in ruffles, powdered wigs, and rapiers, who lived and died for the upholding of their country and its laws.

Mr Richard Ford took great pains to keep everything in the best possible order ; and so tender was he over these footprints of days gone by, that it grieved him to see even the branch of an old tree removed, or a dead shrub replaced ; and although his steps, as he slowly trod the Dyne Court avenues, did not fall where his ancestors

had trodden before him, he reverenced the associations of a past age, and regarded much of his newly-bought property as hallowed ground.

When, therefore, the neighbouring families, in accordance with the expressed wish of Mr Dynecourt, called on the new comer, they decided that, as he could never be a Dynecourt, they were very glad to see him what he was—simple, unpretentious, valuing things which even all his money could not buy for him, and naturally possessed of tastes and feelings which, though he was guilty of an occasional solecism, or a faulty H, prevented him from being called vulgar. His great wealth had introduced him to many fashionable circles, and in them he was the more welcome, because it was understood that he was looking out for some fair maiden whom he might make mistress of his newly-gained possessions. Many a girl, much younger and with far less excuse than Audrey Verschoyle, smiled upon him, and greeted him with sweet words, while he talked to them after a very staid fatherly fashion, and was so very little affected, apparently, by their solicitude, that it was not to be wondered at that Lady Laura should regard with triumph the marked attention which, from their first introduction, he had bestowed upon her daughter.

The handsome carriage was sent to the station for the Verschoyles, and they drove up the avenue to find the master standing at the entrance of the house. He gave Audrey a most cordial welcome, and the mother's heart swelled with pride as she thought how well her child would fill the position to which she saw that she was destined.

From the moment they entered the house, Mr Ford, by his manner, showed that Audrey was the guest he most delighted to honour. When he displayed the beauties of the house, he made her his especial charge, seeming well satisfied when she expressed pleasure ; and he made a note of any alteration she suggested.

The party staying in the house was small, and consisted of a Mr and Mrs Jekyl Finch, together with their daughter, and a cousin to whom she was engaged ; General Trefusis, an old Indian officer, and his sister ; and Mrs Winterton and her niece, Miss Selina Bingham. They had all met before, and the sayings and doings of their mutual acquaintances possessed for each a special interest. The arrival of the Verschoyles was hailed with general satisfaction ; Lady Laura was always so agreeable, Miss Verschoyle so clever, and the son was quite a hero, and so good-looking. Mr Ford expressed himself delighted to see Captain Verschoyle, and added, 'We must invite some nice young lady to look after him.' Quick-sighted Lady Laura decided at once that this remark was intended to convey that Miss Bingham was reserved for somebody else. But who could it be ? Perhaps the old man himself might be coveting her money—those rich people were sometimes so grasping. So she at once answered,—

' My dear Mr Ford, you are too thoughtful ; but my son's health being still very delicate, I fear he has the bad taste to prefer the attentions of his mother to those of the most charming young lady in England where any reciprocity of interest would be expected. No, no, you must leave my son to me.'

Lady Laura took great pains to repeat this offer of Mr Ford's to the guests individually, varying the remarks according to the condition of the hearer. She told Miss Bingham that her son never paid any girl the slightest attention beyond common politeness.

'He declares he shall never fall in love with any one ; but you know, my dear, he's been spoilt—that's the truth of the matter. Men never care for women who wear their hearts upon their sleeve.'

Whereupon Captain Verschoyle's naturally winning manner was regarded by the heiress as a personal compliment, and every courtesy he showed her seemed of double value when it came from a man unaccustomed to be generally gracious. The days passed very idly and pleasantly. They chatted and gossiped together, they lingered over breakfasts and luncheons, they strolled in couples over the grounds, Audrey being always the companion of their host, who took sedate pleasure in showing his knowledge of Roman antiquities, and the history of abbeys and monasteries. She, in her turn, listened complacently, and would intersperse his rather heavy facts with old traditions, legends, and anecdotes of the places with which these archaic memories were connected. These talks were not altogether uncongenial, and Audrey remembered she had often felt far more bored by the conversation of other eligible but younger 'partis' than she did after an hour's *tête-à-tête* with Mr Richard Ford. Though she had not been at Dyne Court a week the servants looked upon her as their probable future mistress, and most eyes followed, with curious gaze, the couple as they

walked together—Audrey's tall, beautiful figure gaining height from her sweeping dress, and her dark hair arranged so as to display to the best advantage her well-formed head, which she had to bend when she addressed her companion.

At the close of one of these long summer days, Audrey had been singing for the old man. She had never reckoned singing amongst her accomplishments ; and if asked to sing would say that she could not. But Mr Ford thought it the sweetest voice he had ever heard, and was wonderfully stirred by the few well-chosen words (for she always looked to the words more than the music) rather spoken than sung. They were sitting in the gloaming, apart from the rest of the party, who were amusing themselves independently of the singer. Miss Verschoyle did not seek to disguise that she was solely intent on giving pleasure to the master of the house. Mr Ford had asked her for old-fashioned songs, and she had given him several ; her companion hardly thanking her in words, yet quietly showing her how he enjoyed the treat. At length, without a thought, she commenced to sing 'Auld Robin Gray.'

'Such a mistake !' Lady Laura afterwards observed ; but at the time she only said immediately it was concluded, 'My dear Audrey, pray do not sing any more of those doleful ditties.' But Audrey did not reply. She rose and shut the piano softly, while Mr Ford said, huskily, 'Thank you, my dear, it is twenty years since last I heard that song.' Then she said to him, 'Will you walk round the terrace with me ? I want to see who the

man was standing outside the window listening to me.'

They walked round, but could see no one.

'It was your fancy, I think,' said Mr Ford.

'No, it was not,' replied Audrey.

'Then, perhaps, it was one of the servants.'

Audrey did not feel inclined to say that she knew it was not a servant, for it little mattered. So they spoke of other things, and joined General Trefusis, Miss Bingham, and Captain Verschoyle in a short stroll. As they were entering the house again a servant came up and said, 'Mr Dynecourt has arrived, sir.'

'Where is he?' asked Mr Ford. 'Will you excuse me, Miss Verschoyle?' and he hurried away.

Captain Verschoyle followed his sister into her room that evening, with the evident intention, as she said, of having a gossip. So she might just as well resign herself and dismiss Marshall at the onset, 'to "improve the shining hours," meaning the moonlight, with the chief butler, or baker, or whoever reigns at present in your fickle bosom.'

'The butler, Miss Audrey! Well, I never; what will you make me out next? Why, he's nearly seventy!'

'And a very suitable age for you,' replied her mistress, laughing.

'No such thing, Marshall,' exclaimed Captain Verschoyle; 'you are a great deal too good-looking to become a nurse yet; besides, what would that Devonshire landlady's sailor son say?'

'Thank you, sir,' said Marshall; 'you know everybody doesn't care about setting the Prayer-book commandment

—that you mustn’t marry your grandfather—at defiance,’ and Marshall demurely bade them ‘Good-night.’

‘That was a sly hit at you, Audrey.’

‘Yes, I suppose so; Marshall has given me several hints as to the interest shown in the servants’ hall regarding their master’s wooing. By the way, what do you think of your brother-in-law elect?’

‘Brother-in-law elect!’ echoed Captain Verschoyle; ‘why, you have not accepted him, have you?’

‘No; because he has not yet done me the honour to offer me his hand, and—shall we say?—heart; but, when that glory is laid at my feet, I intend to invest myself as quickly as possible with all the insignia of office which may belong to the dignity of Mrs Richard Ford.’

‘Be serious, Audrey. Do you think the man means to ask you to be his wife?’

‘No; but the master of Dyne Court intends asking me to be the mistress, and I intend accepting. Don’t look so grave, Charlie; I have tried for matrimonial prizes far more distasteful than this man is to me, notwithstanding that he may call me “Ordrey” and sometimes hope I am “appy.”’

‘But surely you *must* shrink from marrying *him*. Mark you, I am not speaking against the man, for I feel sure he is good at heart, and there is much to admire in the good sense which makes him above being ashamed that he has risen in life. But, Audrey, his age, his appearance,—oh! it seems such a dreadful sacrifice,—and for what?’

‘For what?’ she answered; ‘for all I hold dear. I dream of the entertainments I shall give, the people I

shall gather round me here, the dress, the jewels, the carriages, the thousand and one delicious extravagances I may commit when I have money at my command. We don't look at the value of the coin, we esteem it for what it will bring us. So with Mr Ford, if I regarded him standing on his own personal merits, I should shudder to be obliged to spend my life with an elderly man who has long passed all his romance, and in the days when he did possess it, would have perhaps bestowed it upon a—cook or serving-maid. No, no, Mr Richard Ford individually is ignored, and is only regarded by me as the medium by which I shall attain all I have ever desired and longed for.'

'But, Audrey, don't tell me your heart has never pictured any other life than one of endless frivolity and company ?'

'Marry for love !' she said, scornfully ; 'love is very well in a novel on a rainy day, but how does it stand in reality ?'

'Audrey,' said Captain Verschoyle, 'give up all idea of this marriage ; you may yet meet with some one to inspire a different feeling.'

'Never now : my heart is choked up with other gods ; love could not take root in such a stony soil ; the first little storm would tear it up to wither and die. Moreover, I must say this is rather cool of you to take me to task for my adoration of Mammon, when you are at this very moment paying homage at the same shrine. Now then, it is my turn to cross-question. Do you *really* intend proposing to Miss Bingham ?'

‘That is a question I have asked myself several times’ and hitherto I have been unable to give any answer. She is a very nice girl, and I might become very fond of her, but I should never be in love with her.’

‘I think she would not say No to being Mrs Verschoyle,’ said Audrey.

‘I am not at all sure of that,’ replied her brother; ‘but this I am sure of, that she will not break her heart if she is not asked, for with all her timid yea-nayishness, she has a very decided preference for herself, and whoever she marries will never be anything but prince consort in her heart. Yet a man might do worse, and there is no reason why he should not love her for herself, for she is rather pretty and tolerably accomplished.’

‘Yes,’ interrupted Audrey, ‘that is her fault; you feel that you must always qualify everything you say of her, and consequently she has no positive character.’

‘Very unlike my sister there,’ laughed Captain Verschoyle.

‘Oh! I know I like to have my own way, and I dare say if I had fallen in love it would have been with some weak amiable creature, who deferred to me in all things, and was entirely guided by my opinion. And yet I detest men of that kind.’

‘Ah!’ said her brother, ‘my ideal is a woman who has an opinion, and yet is ready to follow out that of the man she loves; a woman like our sweet Quaker friend, who freely gave her ideas, and then quietly added, “But my husband’s wish is different;” and love had made that

law so strong that it never entered her mind to resist it. Do you know, I often think of her.'

'So do I,' said Audrey. 'That afternoon seemed to open up a fresh vista of life to me ; the spirit of peace took possession of me then. I shall never forget the scene—the mother and daughter—I can recall the very sound of their voices. But there goes twelve o'clock ; my dear Charlie, be off, or I shall look like a wraith to-morrow.'

Captain Verschoyle rose to bid her good-night, saying—

'You will think over what we have been talking about. Don't marry this man if you feel you may some day repent it. Money cannot bring everything, Audrey.'

She laughingly shook her head in dissent, and without replying to his question, said,—

'Oh ! by the way, did you hear who Mr Dynecourt is ?'

'No,' answered her brother. 'What about him ?'

'I know nothing about him, only a servant told Mr Ford that Mr Dynecourt had arrived, and he hurried off to see him, and I left the drawing-room before he returned.'

'Dynecourt ?' said Captain Verschoyle ; 'that must be one of the family to whom the place belonged.'

Pernaps so ; I never heard anything but that it had belonged to a very old family who had lost their money. Mr Ford was once about to give me their history, but something prevented him. Now if he should prove young, and good-looking, and a rival to Captain Verschoyle ? But don't despair ; should the worst come, call me to the rescue, and I'll measure swords with the interloper, and ~~as~~

it would be perhaps my last passage of arms, it should be successful, and insure victory.'

'Ah, well,' said her brother, 'as I do not yet know whether I wish to be the victor I shall not engage your services. Good-night. Think over what we have been talking about.'

'Yes, I promise.'

And she kept her promise. She said to herself that she would look at it on every side, and on every side the advantage of marrying Mr Ford showed itself. She felt certain that, with the help of some of her relations, who held a good place in the fashionable world, she could introduce her husband into it, and once there she knew she should need no help to keep her place. No one understood expending a large income better than Audrey; and her reflections were often forgotten in the pictures her fancy presented, of some wonderful *fête* or entertainment, where she would display her taste, and make herself the envy of people who had often offended her by their indifference or their patronage. Yes, she would accept Mr Ford gladly; she felt almost certain he would propose to her, though not quite so soon as Charlie imagined. 'I dare say he will defer it until almost the last day, which would be just what I should like; and then I shall settle the matter, go to town, and prepare my *trousseau*, and we need not meet again until a day or two before the—,' here she sat down pausing before the word—'wedding.' Her hands lay idly in her lap, her wide-open eyes had that look which tells of blindness to external objects; a slight trembling of the mouth now and then showed that

she was thinking deeply, seriously. The clock striking one broke in on her reverie, and she gave a short, quick sigh as the words seemed to rise to her lips, her tongue almost giving sound to the thought—‘Whatever comes, I trust I shall never forget that my duty is to be very kind to the old man.’

And Audrey was soon in dreamland ; and entertainments, and balls, and weddings, and funerals, all mixed themselves together in her mind, until Marshall’s voice awoke her, telling her that it was past eight o’clock, and that there was a fresh visitor to dress for that morning.

CHAPTER X.

AT CROSS-PURPOSES.

MISS VERSCHOYLE did not make her appearance in the breakfast-room next morning until nearly ten o'clock. Most of the party had already left, and the remainder were about to follow their example. Mr Ford was still sitting at the table, in order, as it seemed, to converse with his newly-arrived guest, who had only just commenced breakfast. As Audrey entered the room, Mr Ford advanced to meet her, and after the usual salutations, led her to the table, saying,—

‘ Miss Verschoyle, you must allow me to introduce Mr Dynecourt to you, a gentleman to whom I feel very grateful for giving me the pleasure of his company for a short time.’

Good Richard Ford uttered these words nervously, fearing that his speech might not convey so much honour as he wished it to do. Gladly would he have sunk into

temporary insignificance, if Mr Dynecourt would have consented to consider that he was still master in his old home. Geoffrey Dynecourt had shrunk from paying this visit; but his voluntary banishment had so visibly pained the new owner, that he determined, in gratitude for the kindness and consideration Mr Ford had shown him, to overcome this feeling. It was a trial to go as guest where he had lived as master, but it was only one of many, and he began to take rather a pride in conquering his feelings, and forgetting that he had ever been anything but what he now was—Geoffrey Dynecourt, barrister of the Inner Temple.

Miss Verschoyle acknowledged the pleasure it gave her to meet Mr Dynecourt, who rose, bowed, and gave her a chair. Then as both looked up to take a closer inspection of each other, their eyes met, and Audrey knew that it was he who had stood listening to her while singing.

‘I am fortunate,’ she said, ‘in finding a companion, for generally at breakfast I have the full benefit of my own society.’

‘Why,’ replied Mr Dynecourt, ‘do you so dislike early rising?’

‘Oh! I detest it; the family morning meal, when all are assembled at eight or nine o’clock, is a remnant of barbarism, invented doubtless to promote and keep alive discord. Who could feel amiable at that hour?’

‘Well, I don’t know,’ said Mr Dynecourt, laughing, ‘I was up at six this morning, and I felt quite as fond of mankind then as I do now.’

'Oh ! but not of womankind,' put in Mr Ford ; 'for then, my dear sir, you had not seen Miss Verschoyle.'

'Mr Ford is so charmingly old-fashioned,' said Audrey, smiling, 'that he has not forgotten that the most effectual way of making a woman good-tempered, is to pay her a compliment.'

'Do you really think, Miss Verschoyle,' asked Mr Dynecourt, 'that ladies set so much value on flattery or compliments ?'

Speaking from what I hear most people say, I should most certainly say no ; speaking from personal experience, most decidedly yes. I delight in a compliment, and can comfortably digest a very tolerable quantity of wholesome flattery. I often smile, as you are doing now, at this weakness, but "it is our nature to," and we cannot help feeling very kindly towards a man who delicately shows us our superiority. But of course it must be managed skilfully. When it is so, I may know quite well that it is not true ; yet I like to hear it, and in a way believe it.'

Mr Dynecourt looked at her steadily.

'Ah !' she said, 'I know you are pitying my weakness.'

'No indeed, I was thinking what an unusual amount of truthfulness you have.'

'Are you trying my powers of credulity ?' she asked, somewhat scornfully, 'because you have already succeeded in overstepping the boundary, and stumbled on a piece of flattery which I *cannot* swallow.'

'Have I ?' he answered ; 'it was quite unintentional. I never pay compliments, that is not my forte.'

At this point Miss Bingham came into the room, saying that they had decided upon a charming plan. They were to ramble through the Abbey-Woods, taking luncheon with them for the 'Abbot's Rest,' then they would return by 'The Dame's Farm,' get some tea there, and drive back again by dinner-time.

'That will be charming,' exclaimed Audrey, turning to Mr Dynecourt.

'Yes,' he said, 'I think you have been happy in your arrangements.'

Miss Bingham hastened off to enter more fully into an account of what was to be done: Audrey and Mr Dynecourt seated themselves on one of the seats on the terrace, and carried on an animated conversation, until Marshall came from Lady Laura, to say that she wished to speak to Miss Verschoyle.

Audrey obeyed the summons, deciding that she would give herself a treat that day, and devote some portion of her company to Mr Dynecourt. 'I fancy I shall like him,' she thought, 'or else I shall dislike him, for he is one of those people one must have decided opinions about; and mine are, as yet, unformed. I think he is good-looking.'

'Marshall, don't you think that gentleman I was sitting with—Mr Dynecourt I mean—is very handsome?'

'Handsome, Miss Audrey, la! no; he looks to me all one colour—eyes, skin, and hair; and he has such a melancholy, haughty sort of look, just like the picture of that Lord Howard at Spencer House, as if he was saying, "I'm very miserable, but I defy you to pity me."'

'Well, really, he has something Vandykeish about him,'

returned Miss Verschoyle. 'I expect it is that short pointed brown beard which gives the expression ; but I think him very good-looking, and I am not sure that I shall not end by calling him very handsome.'

'*You don't mean it, Miss Audrey ; though I must say you have a very peculiar taste.* You always thought that Adam Gregor was good-looking—a poor woebegone fellow. Everybody to their liking, of course, but give me a nice fresh colour, with good curly hair and whiskers, and eyes like sloes, and anybody may have the peaky-faced, yellow-haired gentlemen for me.'

'What ! are you still faithful to that Jack-my-Hearty you met at Plymouth ?'

'I'm sure I don't know who you mean, Miss Audrey, but I suppose if I am going to lose my young lady, it's quite time that I was faithful to somebody, and had got somebody to be faithful to me.'

'Very true, Marshall ; but I am not off your hands yet ; and you and I are too old stagers to count our chickens before they are hatched.'

'Oh ! but, miss, it's all secure this time ; if you will say "yes," there'll be nobody to gainsay you. I wish I was as sure of being comfortably settled, as I am that before this time next year, I shall see you mistress here.'

Miss Verschoyle laughed. 'And if so,' she said, 'get your sailor friend to leave off toiling on the sea, and become a tiller of the ground, and we'll find him a sinecure situation. Did you say mamma was in my room ?'

'Yes, miss.'

Audrey entered, and found Lady Laura engaged in

pulling out and crimping up the frills and lace attached to the costume which she and Marshall had agreed that Audrey should wear.

'I am not going to wear that dress, mamma,' she exclaimed, '*I shall wear my new blue one.*'

'Why spoil that, dear? You look very well in this one, and Mr Ford, I see, is not an impressionable man as regards dress.'

Audrey did not answer Lady Laura's remark. She only said,—

'I have made up my mind to wear the blue.'

Now, under ordinary circumstances this would have been a declaration of war in words, which would have raged sharply, until Audrey had given in, and conceded to her mother's wishes; but just now Lady Laura was wonderfully yielding and amiable towards her daughter. So she told Marshall to put away the refused dress carefully, and left her daughter under the maid's hands. Miss Verschoyle desired that her hair might be re-arranged after a fashion she considered particularly becoming. Altogether she took such an interest in her appearance, that Marshall felt quite certain her mistress had something 'fresh in her head.' When her toilette was finished, and Audrey went into her mother's room for inspection, Lady Laura exclaimed,—

'You were quite right, my dear, to decide upon the blue. I never saw you looking better. Charles, love, come and congratulate your sister on her appearance.'

Captain Verschoyle, who had been sitting with Lady

Laura, turned round, and lifting up his eyebrows to evince his astonishment, asked who it was all for.

‘Who is it for?’ repeated Lady Laura; ‘really, Charles!’

‘Well, then, what is it for?’ said Captain Verschoyle.

‘For your especial benefit, sir,’ replied Audrey, with a significant nod as she went out of the room.

‘Dear girl, how I shall miss her!’ said Lady Laura pathetically. ‘I am sure no disinterestedness can equal that of a mother in giving up her children.’ Then, seeing Marshall had gone, she added confidentially, ‘My idea is, that Audrey has determined that the old gentleman shall propose to-day; and a very excellent thought it is, for they could not have a more fitting opportunity.’

‘Oh, mother! the idea of her sacrificing herself in this way is hateful to me.’

‘Now, Charles, I beg—I insist—that you do not mention such a thing to Audrey; not that I think my daughter would listen to such an absurd word as sacrifice, in the case of a girl who has not a penny marrying a man with £30,000 a year.’

‘Come, mother, don’t forget you were young yourself,’ answered her son.

‘Yes, young and foolish, Charles. Your dear father was a charming man, and I am sure I idolized him; but he ought never to have married me—I have said so dozens of times to him, and he always agreed with me. *I* love my children too well ever to expose them to such a life of struggle to keep up appearances as I have had.’

‘But,’ said Captain Verschoyle, ‘do you not think you

would have been much happier if you had accepted your position, acknowledged yourself unable to compete with your wealthy friends, and contented yourself with the society of those who valued you for yourself?’

‘And where, I should like to know, would you have been had I only studied my own ease? Really, Charles, I was unprepared for such ingratitude in you, when my one aim has been to maintain and keep my position for my children’s sake.’

‘My dear mother, you know I appreciate all your goodness, but I do dislike being tolerated and patronized, through accepting invitations I can never make any return for.’

‘Then all I can say is, I am very sorry to hear that my son possesses such a plebeian spirit of independence. A proper pride, which forbids one to make intimates of vulgar people, or to associate with persons one never meets in society, I *can* appreciate; but to give up the *entrée* to such houses as stamp your standing in society, because the people don’t make a great fuss about you, or be unable to put up with a somewhat rude speech from a person who can get you invited to most of the places other people are dying to be seen at, would be a piece of folly which few well-bred persons, I think, could understand.’

Captain Verschoyle smiled as he answered,

‘Your ladyship lays too much weight on aristocratic birth and breeding, forgetting that “virtue alone is true nobility.”’

‘Charles, I beg you will not repeat any of those horrid radical sayings to me. You are really growing exactly like

that odious old Henry Egerton, who is always preaching about equality. I suppose you will be telling me next that it is my duty to visit with the greengrocer, and to cultivate the society of the butcher and baker, with a view to an ultimate alliance being formed with some of them.'

'Well, you know,' said her son, slyly, 'you are giving your consent to one of the family marrying a tradesman.'

'I have no patience with you, Charles. If you have not the sense to understand the difference which a colossal fortune makes in the man's position, I give you up. I have never asked, and I have no curiosity to know, how Mr Ford made his money. It is enough for me to know that he *has it*, and that society accepts him on the same terms. I am quite sure that when he is Audrey's husband they will be in a very good set; I shall take care of that. Our family know too well what is due to any member of it not to lend a helping hand. I don't expect your uncle Spencer, nor Lord Towcester, nor any of our aristocratic cousins, to make a boon companion of the man, but I feel certain that they'll ask him to their large entertainments, and make a point of always accepting his invitations to dinner.'

'Poor old gentleman!' exclaimed Captain Verschoyle, 'he won't trouble the family long; he'll soon sink under all the greatness thrust upon him. Do you think that if I were to honour with my hand some daughter of a house gilded but yet defiled by trade, I should be able to insure that my wife would be jostled by the aristocratic elbows assembled at Grantley House, and snubbed by the patrician mouth of Lady Spencer?

‘There can be no occasion for me to answer such absurd questions. Besides, I hope *your* wife will be able to enter society in her own right. The Bingtons are an old county family, and distantly connected with Lord Radnor and the Tuftons. I found all that out from Mrs Winterton.’

‘Oh! is it decided, then, that Miss Bingham is to be your future daughter-in-law?’

‘Well, it will be your own fault if she is not, and I should think you would hardly be so blind as to throw such a chance away; for though you keep your looks remarkably well, you have certainly lost much of the *esprit* you had some years ago. I wanted to speak to you about Miss Bingham, only we have wasted all our time over this ridiculous discussion. I see now who Mr Ford was reserving her for.’

‘And who was that?’

‘This Mr Dynecourt he makes so much of. It is not likely he will have a chance with *you*; but still I should redouble my attentions, and when all is settled between Audrey and Mr Ford, she can give him a hint not to press the young man to prolong his stay.’

‘I beg you will do nothing of the kind, mother, for I can assure you it is not at all certain at present that I shall ever wish to dispute any one’s claim to the honour of being Miss Bingham’s suitor.’

Lady Laura saw that her son was not now inclined to listen favourably to her schemes for his marriage, so she wisely resolved to hold her tongue. Professing to be suddenly amazed at the lateness of the hour, she asked him if

it was not time that he should join the rest of the party, whom she was going to see start, for her inclination did not prompt her to accompany them.

Mr Ford proposed driving to Abbot's Gate, and Audrey volunteered to be his charioteer. As they had to go round a long distance, they started before the pedestrians. The conversation naturally turned upon Mr Dynecourt, and Audrey heard to her great surprise that he had been the former owner of the property. Mr Ford grew eloquent while eulogizing the man who had acted so nobly.

'I do not expect you to admire his conduct as I do, Miss Verschoyle, because you have not been brought up to look on an honest, independent spirit as I have; but the man who possesses that, and sufficient perseverance to battle with the world and to conquer, why it is nineteen to one but he'll succeed. Where should I have been but for that? Certainly not sitting beside you, my dear young lady,' he added, sobering down, lest he might become too confidential in his enthusiasm. 'I tell Mr Dynecourt he'll die Lord Chancellor yet. I hate going to law, but I should almost snatch an opportunity that I might do him a good turn.'

'Why,' said Audrey, 'what is he?'

'A barrister, and a very rising one, too. He has many influential friends, and every sensible man commends his spirit. Some of his other friends wished him to wait and get a diplomatic something, but he preferred doing what he has done, and I honour him.'

'Poor fellow!' said Audrey, 'what a trial; not only

giving the place up, but all the old memories and associations ; oh ! I do *so* feel for him.'

'So did I, Miss Verschoyle, more than I ever did for any one in my life.'

'But could nothing be done ?' said Audrey ; 'was he irretrievably ruined ?'

'Nothing could be done then ; things had been going from bad to worse for generations ; the former owners had shut their eyes, and left to their successors the task of amending matters, or of plunging deeper into the mire. I cannot explain it to you, but embarrassments hedged him in completely, so that notwithstanding the enormous sum I paid for the place, Mr Dynecourt was not able to secure more than suffices to bring him in £500 a year. I tell you this, knowing it will go no farther.'

'Certainly,' replied Audrey, 'it is safe with me. I am very glad you have told me.'

'I thought when I did so you would appreciate him,' said Mr Ford, kindly.

'I do, and you too, Mr Ford ; you have a very noble nature.'

'Thank you, my dear ; that is a compliment which, coming from you, I value very much.'

Had Audrey entertained the idea her mother had credited her with, and pursued her opportunity, assuredly she would then have been offered the hand of Richard Ford. But she did not wish that the honour should be presented to her just yet. So, when they reached Abbot's Gate, and had sent the carriage back, she adroitly changed

the subject by reminding Mr Ford that he had never given her an account of the ruin they were going to see at Abbot's Rest. Once launched on his favourite topic, Audrey was safe from all love passages, which, to speak truth, Mr Ford was very glad to shirk ; for he more often wished his companion was his daughter than that she should be his wife. He had no desire to marry ; and the only inducement was, that, with the exception of two or three distant cousins, about whom he cared nothing, he had nobody to whom he could leave his wealth. Though he could always gather people round him, yet he was very lonely in the midst of them. And then he was being constantly told that he ought to marry. He had taken a great liking to Audrey ; and since she had been his guest his regard had grown daily, until he had made up his mind that if he did marry, she should be his wife. Still he gave a sigh when he thought of this, for notwithstanding his sixty years, his stout figure, and generally commonplace appearance, Richard Ford had a seat in his heart which death had left vacant ; and it seemed to him something like sacrilege to a memory to fill that place, even in name.

CHAPTER XI.

ABBOT'S WALK.



ABBOT'S WALK was a long avenue of beech trees, at the end of which was an old ivy-covered ruin of what had probably been a votive chapel to some saint. Tradition said that the pious abbot, Petrock, had 'raised it to that reverend St German, bishop of Auxerre, whose memorial was so sacred among the Britons, that many churches were dedicated to his memory in this island ;' and the good Petrock having gone thither, as was his daily wont, to meditate on the saint's wisdom, 'in that he had been one of those who confuted Pelagius's heresy,' was found by the monks seemingly in a deep sleep, from which he had never awakened. From that time they had named this peaceful retreat 'The Abbot's Rest.' You might have wandered many a long mile before so fair and secluded a spot would have met your eye. Coming immediately out of the rather gloomy walk, the little knoll on which the

ruin stood looked bright without being sunny. Its rich carpet of wild thyme was studded with flowers rarely found in any other part of the grounds. The large stones, lying here and there, were covered with moss, and formed supports to thick low bushes of roses, which were cut, in order to prevent their long branches trailing over the ground. On the side opposite the ruin, you were separated from Dyne woods by a lazy murmuring stream.

When Audrey and Mr Ford came suddenly to this spot, they both uttered an exclamation of surprise, to find the whole party assembled. They were all sitting quietly after their walk, either silently resting, or conversing in low whispers. The first couple Audrey took note of was her brother and Miss Bingham. Then she looked all round. To her disappointment, Mr Dynecourt was not there. But he might have rambled away with the Rector's daughter, so she asked—

‘Did you call for Miss Coventry?’

‘We sent for her,’ said Miss Bingham, ‘but she had an engagement.’

Perhaps he was coming later.

After a time she said, ‘But where is Mr Dynecourt?’

‘He asked me to excuse him early in the morning,’ returned Mr Ford.

‘Yes,’ added Miss Trefusis, ‘he walked to the first gate with us, and pointed out the prettiest way, but he said he was unable to join us.’

‘We made a bargain together,’ said Mr Ford, ‘that if he would come here, he should be entirely free to do as he liked, and go where he liked unquestioned. I dare

say he has gone off to one of the neighbours : they are all anxious to see him.'

'There are no people living very near here though?' said Audrey.

'No,' replied Mr Ford, 'but he is an excellent walker, and if he chooses to ride or drive he can do so.'

In spite of herself, Audrey was vexed as well as disappointed. She had no wish that Mr Dynecourt should fall in love with her, but she wanted him to admire her. Before she had heard his history, she had made up her mind to devote herself to that purpose during the day. This desire had been the cause of the especial regard she had that morning displayed for her personal appearance. Since the conversation with Mr Ford, all her sympathies had been enlisted ; and she resolved she would delicately pay him every attention. He should feel that all this was not from pity, but from an appreciation of his character. And now, after all this thought and planning on her part, he was not to be present to receive the benefit. She was piqued. But after a time she smiled at her unreasonable vexation. 'I am forgetting,' she thought, 'that I am scarcely on promotion now. How odd it will be for me to have done with scheming ; it will rather diminish the zest of going out. I wonder what thorns lie on the bed of roses upon which unbounded wealth reposes. Not many, I fancy, that will penetrate my hardened skin. So adieu to my new-fledged fancy, I'll console myself with my Nestor ; but, my mood being somewhat captious, I had better not indulge in *tête-à-têtes*.'

The day passed very pleasantly, Audrey exerting her-

self to amuse everybody ; helping General Trefusis to compound a delicious mystery in the shape of a champagne cup ; washing the salad in the stream ; insisting on Mr Ford helping her to lay the table ; then making him sit down and watch her, because she feared he was tired ; and finally, knowing the two old gentlemen had walked quite enough, she professed herself unable to get farther than Abbot's Gate. General Trefusis and Mr Ford must, therefore, please drive with her, and they would meet the rest of the party at 'The Dame's Farm,' and after tea, again drive home together.

After they had departed, Mrs Crichett, the farmer's wife, declared that if that was the lady Mr Ford was to marry, though he had picked the whole world he could not have found a nicer. Roger Cross had told her all about it, and she was a noble-featured madam.

'Ah !' exclaimed the good woman, 'I wish it was one of the old stock she was to be bride to ; what a couple the master and she would make !'

While Audrey was dressing for dinner, she told her mother how much they had enjoyed their day. Though she did not seem to have had any formal proposal made to her, yet as she had evidently devoted herself to Mr Ford, Lady Laura was delighted to hear her daughter so often unconsciously couple their names together. Charles, too, seemed to have made up for his dereliction, by paying Miss Bingham very pointed attentions. All was thus going on in a way to satisfy her maternal anxiety. As her

eyes followed *Audrey's* graceful figure through the room, she said, with pride, to Marshall—

‘Miss *Audrey* is very elegant, Marshall.’

‘Yes, my lady; she pays for dress.’

‘My family always do,’ replied *Lady Laura*. ‘We seem born for silks, and satins, and jewels; but then you seldom see a well-born person over-dressed. There was that *Mrs Danegelt*; people made such a fuss about her, though I always thought she had too many ornaments on; and afterwards I discovered that her father was a woollen draper. It’s a very odd thing how naturally people seem to become what they are born to.

‘But, my lady, some people seem to think that anything becomes them,’ said Marshall, drily.

‘That is very true, Marshall; and I am glad to know you have so much sense. It is very sad to see all the barriers of distinction in dress and other things broken down; besides, it is so wicked, because, of course, it is the will of Providence.’

‘Ah! mamma,’ laughed *Audrey*, ‘you may depend upon it there are people desperate enough to believe that we are all brothers and sisters.’

‘Well, perhaps, figuratively speaking, we are so; but every right-minded person will know and appreciate the demands of aristocratic birth.’

‘Then you are not one of that sort, Marshall,’ said *Audrey*; ‘for I have been demanding my fan and my handkerchief for the last twenty minutes, because, if permitted, my wish is to descend to the drawing-room.’

Mr Dynecourt made his appearance at dinner. He did not sit near Audrey, and she took little part in the general conversation. Lady Laura remarking this, Mr Ford excused her, saying she must be tired. She had done so much that day, he explained ; adding, in his usual old-fashioned way, 'she has shown us that she can be as useful as she is ornamental.' Audrey nodded her thanks to the old gentleman ; and, shielding herself under the plea of fatigue, ate her dinner almost in silence.

The Finches were leaving the next day ; so Mr Ford considered it incumbent upon him to devote himself to them that evening ; and Miss Verschoyle was allowed to enjoy her book undisturbed. At last the daylight slowly faded away, and she was obliged to give up reading. Almost immediately after, somebody said,—

'I have been waiting patiently for you to close your book. I had not the courage to disturb you.'

It was Mr Dynecourt ; and, having said this, he seated himself by her side. Audrey expressed regret that he had not shared in the pleasure of the day.

'Did you not think of us all?' she asked.

'I do not know that I thought of you all ; I thought of you very often.'

'And why?' she demanded.

'Well, I can hardly say why, but things you had said came back to my mind. I have seen so few ladies lately, that you do not know what a treat it is to me to talk to one.'

'Ah!' she answered, laughing, 'observing I was unduly flattered by your remembering me especially, you hasten

to show me the compliment is due to my sex, not to my individual charms.'

'Indeed you are wrong ; my fear is that from having been unused to ladies' society, I shall say too readily what is in my mind, and so give offence by my apparent boldness.'

'Have you no sisters, then ?'

'No, nor any near female relative. All my intimate friends are middle-aged married people, so that I have never been in a position to talk unreservedly with any woman.'

'Do not tell me I have before me such a *rara avis* as a man who has never cared for any woman in particular.'

'You have,' he returned. 'I do not say I was never haunted by a beautiful face, or that I never put myself out of the way to meet some pretty girl who had caught my fancy ; but as to being in love—certainly not. I have never seen any woman whom I desired to marry, and I suppose I never shall now. People do not readily fall in love at eight-and-twenty.'

'Oh, men do,' said Audrey.

'But why men more than women ?'

'Because they are younger at that age.'

'But not in heart ?' said Mr Dynecourt.

'Well, I suppose not, but people can get on very well without love—if they have money.' She added : 'Now, we are very poor. I never had money enough to meet my wants, and naturally I have felt some envy of the people who were able to get all they desired. So I believe the right arrangement is, that the rich men should

marry the poor girls, and the heiresses the men without money.'

'Then,' said Mr Dynecourt, 'pray exclude me from your arrangement, for I would not marry the richest woman in England if I did not love her and she did not love me. I am poor, but because I have lost my property I have not given up every chance of happiness, every claim to the gift which God has left to us as a feeble trace of Eden. You do not mean that, Miss Verschoyle. I could not look into your face without feeling that you have loved, or that you will love deeply and truly.'

'It has not come yet,' she replied ; 'and, to quote your words, people do not readily fall in love at eight-and-twenty. Now, do not betray my confidence, for I have a horror of people knowing how old I am. Indeed, I do not know why I was weak enough to tell you.'

'Oh, I knew it before : Mrs Winterton asked me if I did not admire you ; and added that you were wonderfully young-looking for eight-and-twenty.'

Audrey laughed. 'I hope,' she said, 'you were polite enough to contradict her. I shall think very poorly of your *savoir faire* if you did not.'

'No, I did not contradict her, neither did I agree with her. I said what I thought—that you must have always looked the same, and that you would always continue the same, because it was for something more than actual beauty one would love to look upon such a face as yours.'

She looked up at him quickly. 'Stay,' she said, 'let me recall your speech of this morning : "I never pay compliments—flattery is not my forte."

'See,' said Mr Dynecourt, 'already I have offended you; but don't be too severe. I told you I was afraid that my habit of speaking my thoughts would make you think me over-bold.'

'Indeed!' she replied. 'I only wanted to assure myself that I was not going to hear of my goodness and amiable temper next.'

'I should never tell you that,' he answered, laughing, 'because I am not sure that you have a *very* amiable temper. Do you know I thought you were more cross than tired at dinner?'

Audrey laughed outright.

'So I was,' she said, 'and *you* were the reason. I was vexed with you for not coming to the picnic.'

At this moment Mr Ford came up, and she went on.

'I am just telling Mr Dynecourt that I was very cross with him for not joining us to-day.'

'That's right, my dear, *you* scold him. I did not like to interfere with you,' he continued, laying his hand on the young man's shoulder, 'but I was very disappointed at your not coming. However, we will have another day, and then you'll make up for it. We are going into the next room now; Miss Finch has consented to favour us with a last remembrance of her beautiful music.'

Audrey prepared to follow.

'Afterwards,' said Mr Dynecourt, 'you will sing something.'

'I!' she answered; 'no I never sing to people.'

'But you sing for people. I heard you, and thought it was different from any singing I had listened to before.'

Then she left him, and sat by Miss Finch's side, and afterwards she joined Mr Ford, so there was no further conversation between them. *Mr Ford told her that he hoped she liked his favourite, and that he should be obliged if she would help him in his endeavour to make Mr Dynecourt's visit as pleasant as possible.*

'I shall be delighted to help you in any way I can,' she answered, 'and I like Mr Dynecourt very much. He is rather different from anybody I have met before. I enjoy talking to him.'

'That is right,' answered Mr Ford; 'I want you to be excellent friends. I always like my favourites to take to one another.'

'Then am I a favourite?' she asked, looking smilingly into his face.

'*You* are a very great favourite, my dear. I only wish for your sake that I was a young man.'

'Do not wish that,' she said; 'perhaps you would not be so nice.'

'Perhaps not,' he answered, as he inwardly contemplated himself at five-and-twenty, when he had got his first start in life. How would this elegant young lady have regarded him then? Certainly not with the eyes of love, as, 'drest all in his best,' he gave his Patty a treat and took her to Primrose Hill, or out to enjoy the wonders of the St Helena Gardens. Ah! what happy days those were —past for ever, for money could purchase no delights such as he knew then. He sighed, and turning to Audrey, said:—

'Make the most of your young days, Miss Verschoyle,

for youth has happiness which in after-life we vainly sigh for.'

'Has it?' she replied. 'I feel as if I had never experienced any of those pleasures. It must be very pleasant to have bygone days to recall and dwell upon.'

'Sometimes those memories come back very bitterly,' he said, 'and yet I would not wittingly part with one. Most people would say I have had a wonderfully prosperous life, and I thankfully acknowledge that I have; but if it were permitted that we might in any way make a choice, I would have given up my money had God seen fit to spare me what I valued more.'

Audrey had no opportunity of making any answer, for Mr Ford abruptly turned round and asked Miss Trefusis to play him 'The Harmonious Blacksmith,' and their *tête-à-tête* was not renewed.

CHAPTER XII.

LOOKING TO BOTH SIDES.

O regulate his feelings by his common sense is one of the most difficult tasks a man can set himself to perform. So, at all events, thought Captain Verschoyle as he endeavoured to persuade himself that, should Miss Bingham accept the hand his common sense prompted him to offer her, he ought to consider himself a very lucky fellow. 'She is extremely ladylike,' he said to himself, 'decidedly pretty, and inclined to be uncommonly fond of me.' Yet he did not like her, and it was no use asking himself why. It was enough that, notwithstanding all her attractions, he did not, could not, and never should care for her.

He felt his utter inability to marry without money. Nevertheless this was his real position, and unless the girl he might desire to make his wife possessed an income at least equalling his own, he must forego all idea of changing his condition. True, he might do so if he gave up his profession ; but, when he contemplated all the advan-

tages he hoped to gain by his hard service, his campaigns, and Crimean feats, he exclaimed—

‘No ! not for any woman living. What makes me want to get married I don’t know ; but certainly when I came home this time the idea took possession of me ; and then that foolish old mother of mine is so anxious to secure this chance, which she very flatteringly hints may be my last. Well, I suppose I shall be a fool if I don’t try my luck. A fellow does not get such a chance every day.’

Then, as he stood in front of the glass settling his tie, he thought,—

‘I’m not a bad-looking fellow, and I don’t think that, as men go, I’m a bad sort, but I’m hanged if I believe any woman was ever downright in love with me yet. They’ve shammed, and so have I, so I have not very much right to complain.

After this he succeeded in running a pin into the back of his neck, which feat effectually drove love and Miss Bingham out of his head ; and, after the manner of his sex, he spent the rest of the time in bestowing the most condemnatory epithets on those indispensable requirements. Later in the day he sought his mother, and finding her in her own room, he said suddenly, and without any preamble—

‘Mother, do you know, I think I shall run up to town for a few days.’

Lady Laura regarded her son with considerable surprise, but she would not commit herself further than to repeat, ‘Going to town for a few days !’

‘Yes ; I want to see after those boxes of mine. There is some bother with the railway now.’

Her ladyship put a mark in the book she was reading, shut it, and laid it on the table near her. Then turning round so that she might face her son, she said, as she looked at him fixedly—

‘My dear Charles, what *can* you mean? May I ask what are your intentions?’

Captain Verschoyle laughed as he answered, ‘Well, the truth is, I feel so uncertain of my intentions, that I want to try if a week’s absence will not help my decision.’

Lady Laura gave a little shrug of her shoulders as she continued in her sweetest voice, ‘You are acting very foolishly, Charles, and nothing is more fatal than indecision. Now, if you have any doubt of yourself, why do you not propose this very day, being quite certain what your line of action should be? After the thing is done you cannot draw back, and you will begin at once to see the wisdom of your choice.’

‘No, mother, that is not me at all. If I acted upon your advice I should repent it immediately, and perhaps ever after.’

Lady Laura saw she had best try a little severity, so she demanded in a rather sarcastic tone, ‘Would it be too much to ask you what more you want than a sweet, amiable girl, ready to yield to your every wish; whose money you might spend without a word being asked; who would at any time be made happy by the prospect of a ball or *fête*, and who would be won over and appeased by any trifling article of dress or jewellery, without casting in your teeth

that it was her own silver which had baited the hook that secured her favour ?'

' But, mother, I don't see why I should marry at all unless I am perfectly certain that it would immensely add to my happiness. My income is sufficient to keep *me*.'

' Oh ! indeed, is it ? ' interrupted Lady Laura, elevating her eyebrows with feigned astonishment.

' Well, I know I have kicked over the traces sometimes, but I always manage to make things square in the end. I've always contrived to pay what I owed.'

' Really, have you ? ' Then she added in the same cutting tone, ' What a comfort for a mother to know that she has a son whose highest ambition in life is to be able to pay what he owes ! '

' Come, come,' said Captain Verschoyle, ' you're getting vexed with me, and there is no reason for that. I only tell you that I think I had best have a few days by myself before I decide—perhaps an unnecessary thing—for very likely the young lady or her belongings would turn up their noses at a penniless soldier, though he had the honour of being Lady Laura Verschoyle's son.'

' Indeed, they would do nothing of the kind,' said Lady Laura, angrily. ' Though it is quite true dozens of men would snap at her, yet remember every man is not connected as you are ; and from something I learned about them a few days since, I know that unless she *does* marry somebody of good family, she will never get into a good set. Turn up their noses at *you* indeed ! If they did, I should soon give them a quiet hint which would considerably alter their tone.'

Lady Laura said a great deal more to her son, and he said a great deal more to her ; but in spite of her advices, her remonstrances, and cutting speeches, he ended as he had begun, with a determination to excuse himself to Mr Ford on the plea of business, and to start the next morning for London, where he said he should probably remain a week.

During the day Captain Verschoyle told his sister of his intended visit to London, assigning as a reason for his absence his anxiety about the missing boxes. Audrey only laughed and shook her head as she bade him put no trust in the saying, that 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder.' 'It may make it grow fonder of somebody else, Charlie,' she went on, 'but not of the one on whom you are just now trying the recipe.'

'Mind your own business,' returned her brother, 'and keep your wisdom to help you to swallow your own pill ; for I tell you, Audrey, that if I were you that old fellow would be a choker for me.'

'My dear Charles, do you know that the domestic animals of our species are, by a wonderful provision of nature, gifted with a remarkable power, by which they can get down the most unpleasant bolus, provided it be only well gilded ?'

Then as soon as she had driven him off, and was alone, she said to herself, 'Poor Charlie, he need not be in a great hurry now I shall be of some service to him, I hope. How delightful to think of being able to be generous ! Mr Ford is a liberal man I see, and he is certainly very kind to me ; and I '—here she sat thinking for some time

until the luncheon bell disturbed her, and she arose hurriedly, saying, 'It's of no use; once for all let me remember that the thing is impossible. *Impossible?* Why, what folly will seize me next? Are we not two beggars with nothing but our hearts to call our own? If I do not take care,' she added with a little bitter laugh, 'even that small possession will not remain long in my keeping. How a woman might love him though! And I believe that he *has* never cared for any one before.'

Surely Audrey could not have meant Mr Ford in speaking thus to herself; for as she went down the stairs her last thought was, 'I hope that when I am mistress here he will let me be very kind to him.'

After luncheon Lady Laura took the opportunity of trying to find out from Mrs Winterton how long she thought of remaining at Dynecourt. Hearing that her stay was likely to last for a fortnight longer, her spirits rose.

'To tell you the truth,' she said, 'I am asking on my dear boy's account. Those horrid people at the Horse-Guards will never let him alone, and he has to go there to-morrow on some business which may detain him for a week. Poor fellow! he is so dismal about it; and he is dreadfully anxious to be certain that he will find you here when he returns. I don't think I shall speak to you,' continued her ladyship playfully to Miss Bingham who joined them; 'I am so jealous. Here I find Charles low-spirited and dull because, as I think, he has to leave his foolishly fond mother for a week; but, dear me, I discover that I am nobody, and that all this anxiety is about

somebody else, and whether she will be here when he returns.'

Though Miss Bingham exclaimed, 'Oh ! Lady Laura, what *do* you mean ?' she was evidently pleased, and quite forgot her vexation of a few hours before, which had been occasioned by Captain Verschoyle, without any comment or seeming regret, telling her that he was going to London for a week.

'Ah ! you may well look guilty,' continued Lady Laura, drawing the young lady's arm within her own ; 'and during his absence I shall make you console me by being my constant companion.'

In spite of this manœuvre, and notwithstanding that Lady Laura felt she had managed matters in the best possible manner, she was still extremely annoyed with her son ; and when next morning he came to wish her 'good-bye,' she said that she was very unwell, that she had passed a sleepless night, and that her nerves were completely unstrung.

'Now don't look so dismal, mother,' he said. 'I dare say by the time I come back I shall be only too delighted to listen to your sage advice, and to act upon it.'

Lady Laura closed her eyes, and feebly shook her head, intimating that it little mattered, for he would not have her long : she was not what she used to be before he went to the Crimea.

'Remember, Charles,' she added, 'I cannot stand anxiety now ; and it is only my duty to tell you that Dr Coulson says my life hangs upon the merest thread.'

Still, though she bade him good-bye with the air of one

taking what was likely to prove a final adieu, she entrusted him with a note to her milliner, Madame Roget, telling him to impress upon Madame the urgency of these commissions being immediately attended to, so that the new bonnet and head-dress ordered might be ready by the following Friday, when he was to bring them down with him. After this she kissed him mournfully, and sank back upon the sofa apparently exhausted. But, much to her son's astonishment, as he was slowly descending the stairs, thinking that he had behaved in a most unfeeling manner, he heard her calling in her usual voice—

‘Charles, Charles, tell Madame Roget that if she has any doubt about tulle she is to put lace, but that I desire it may not be such an expensive one as the last she used.’

‘All right, mother,’ replied Captain Verschoyle, greatly relieved by this sudden change for the better; ‘I’ll be sure to execute your commissions, and you shall have something scrumptious when I come back.’

Having already said good-bye to the rest of the party, who were assembled in the dining-room, he drove past with a wave of the hand.

All the way up he had been thinking that perhaps he was, after all, setting off on a fool’s errand. Miss Bingham had looked uncommonly pretty that morning, and she seemed quite sorry that he was going. It would be rather a sell if, while he was away, he should be cut out by Dynecourt, who hadn’t any more than he had, and was therefore equally open to temptation.

‘Well, what a dog-in-the-manger beast I am!’ he said. ‘I don’t want the girl myself—at least I am not quite cer-

tain whether I do want her or not—and so I don't wish any other fellow to have her while the doubt is on my mind. I should not do badly if I had her money, particularly if we were to be quartered at York this winter. What would old Harry Egerton say to her, I wonder? I have a good mind to run down to Darington, and have a talk with the old boy. I want to see him, and I know in his heart he wants to see me, though he'd die before he'd say so.'

And as he drove to his hotel, for he had decided not to go to Egmont Street, he thought over the plan. The next two days in London with nothing to do, nobody to see, and nowhere to go, considerably told in Miss Bingham's favour. Captain Verschoyle came to the conclusion that, having finished his ostensible business and arranged to go to the Paddington station for the missing boxes that evening, he might as well write to his mother and tell her that it was very probable he should return next day. He would not announce his intentions too decidedly, else her ladyship would fancy by his more speedy return that the business was to be settled to her satisfaction without delay. He had only got so far as to say that things must take their course—*che sard sard*. He half wished something would turn up to prevent him from returning before the day he had specified, but he could not stay in London longer—the place was unbearable.

When he reached Paddington the station was in all the bustle consequent on the arrival of the train from Plymouth. He therefore waited until most of the passengers had left, and then went on the platform to speak to the guard. He was standing looking for him when a porter,

addressing some one near, said, 'No, ma'am, there's no lady waiting on the other side.'

'Perhaps we had better go on, then,' returned a voice in answer. 'Wilt thou get a cab for us, and direct the man to drive to the Shoreditch station?'

Captain Verschoyle turned quickly round and exclaimed,—

'Mrs Fox, how glad I am to see you again! I hope you will permit me to be of any service to you that I can.'

Patience held out her hand, saying, 'Indeed, I am very glad to see thee, for I have so little knowledge of London that I feel quite bewildered to be alone. My daughter was to have met us, but I fear something unforeseen has happened, as she is not here.'

'Your daughter!'

'Yes, Grace Hanbury, my married daughter. Oh! Dorothy is with me.'

Immediately Captain Verschoyle was expressing his pleasure at meeting Miss Fox again.

'Did I hear you say you were going to Shoreditch?' he asked.

'Yes, my daughter lives at Fryston, on that line.'

'Then you must allow me to see you safely to the station.'

'Would it not be giving thee trouble?' said Patience.

'No, indeed, it would be giving me great pleasure, so you will not refuse me.'

'Thank thee,' replied Patience; 'in that case I will gladly accept thy offer, for Dorothy and I are but country folk, and, therefore, somewhat timid away from home in this large city.'

CHAPTER XIII.

JOSIAH AT BAY.

DURING the time Patience and Dorothy Fox were under Captain Verschoyle's escort driving to the Shoreditch Station, Grace Hanbury was anxiously waiting for them.

A slight accident had detained the Fryston train for more than an hour on the road, so that Grace did not reach London until after her mother and sister were due at Paddington.

Fearing if she then went on, they might cross each other, she remained where she was, in a state of great anxiety and trepidation ; doubtful as to what they would do—whether come on or wait ; and knowing her mother in any case would be nervous at not seeing her.

The hour she had allowed for their drive from Paddington had passed, and she was standing on the steps irresolute as to the expediency of taking a cab and starting off in search of them ; when, to her unbounded relief, they drove up.

‘Oh, mother ! I am so delighted to see you,’ she exclaimed. ‘I have been so fidgeted about you both. Dorothy, my dear, give me your bag. I started from Fryston so as to have more than an hour to spare ; but the engine of our train broke down, and I was detained on the road for nearly two hours. Of course I was in an agony to know how you would get on, for — looking at Captain Verschoyle — ‘I feared you were alone.’

‘So we were,’ said Patience, ‘but at the station we most fortunately met Charles Verschoyle, and he kindly undertook to see us safely here.’

‘Wilt thou let me introduce thee to my daughter Grace Hanbury?’ she said, turning to Captain Verschoyle, who was looking with some astonishment at this elegant woman, fashionably dressed, and very different from the person he had expected to find awaiting them.

Grace held out her hand, saying, ‘You have done me such good service in taking care of my mother and sister, that we must be friends at once. And now about the luggage : the Fryston train goes in ten minutes, and I think we might save it. If you will stay here, mother, Mr Verschoyle and I will look after your boxes.’

‘Oh !’ said Patience addressing Captain Verschoyle, ‘we must not trespass further on thy goodness.’

‘You must allow me to see you safely off, Mrs Fox ;’ and he followed Grace, who was wondering who this good-looking man could be. ‘Verschoyle ! Verschoyle !’ she could not remember any Friends of that name ; ‘an admirer of Dolly’s perhaps ; I must ask him to dinner.’

The luggage was soon ready. The train drew up, Cap-

tain Verschoyle found them a carriage to themselves helped them in, looked after all their little comforts, and then waited to see them start. By this time he had quite won Grace's heart; so she said 'I hope you will come down to Fryston and see us. It is only a short journey from London, and we can give you a bed.'

Patience was so taken aback at this speech, she hardly knew what to do; and at that moment it was impossible to explain to Grace the slight knowledge they had of the young man whom she mistook for an intimate acquaintance.

Captain Verschoyle saw her confusion; and thinking it perhaps arose from the difference in her mind between their positions, he answered—

'You are very kind, and I should like to come of all things; but unfortunately I was thinking of leaving town to-morrow.'

'Don't go to-morrow, come to us to-morrow; I want to introduce my husband to you.'

'Well, if you don't mind having me to-morrow, I will come with pleasure.'

'I am so glad,' said a soft voice. It was Dorothy, who, meeting Captain Verschoyle's eyes, blushed crimson. She had not intended to give utterance to her thoughts—only she was so glad he was coming that she might see him again. Twenty times during the last two hours she had wished Josiah Crewdson were like him, not only in appearance, but in knowing everything you wanted without being told, and in saying such pleasant things.

Dorothy need not have been so hard upon poor

Josiah ; sympathy might have softened her comparisons, for just now it was she who was self-conscious and shy, sitting silent while her mother and Grace talked to their new friend.

Mrs Hanbury gave him all the necessary instructions about the train he was to come by ; and then they had to say 'Good-bye,' leaving Captain Verschoyle standing, hat in hand, watching their departure.

'What a handsome man, mother !' exclaimed Grace, as soon as they were out of hearing ; 'so nice too, and gentlemanly ! Who is he ?'

Patience gave her the history of their acquaintanceship, and Grace was much amused at it, and her own mistake ; 'for, of course,' she said, 'I supposed he was a friend of yours ; indeed,' she added laughing, 'I was not sure he was not a lover of our little Dolly's.'

'Oh ! Grace,' cried Dorothy, while all the blood seemed rushing to her face, 'why, he is a soldier.'

'A soldier ! what, one of father's old enemies ! Why, you look as horrified, child, as if he were a Mohammedan. Dear me ! how father used to lash those unfortunate red coats, until I longed to take up the cudgels in their defence. But I dare say he has changed many of his notions against them since the war ; for notwithstanding our prejudices, we Friends would have fared badly but for these "sons of Belial," as Dorcas Horsenail used to term them.'

'Ah ! thou must not laugh at Dorcas,' said Patience ; 'her peculiarities are few, and her good qualities many. When any of the soldiers come home sick or disabled,

Dorcas forgets whose sons she calls them, and makes them her own charge.'

'Yes, and you will see, mother,' added Grace, 'that all these prejudices which Friends have held because their grandfathers held them, will die out; while those principles which they have sifted for themselves, will continue as long as the sect exists. As for the love of fighting, it is born in boys; I believe it is their very nature.'

'What dost thou think I heard father ask cousin Josh when he came to see us?' said Dorothy,—'If he did not remember at York school how they used to fight the boys of other schools, when they called after them "Quack, Quack!"

'That is splendid—oh! we will hold that as a rod in pickle over him, Dolly.'

The rest of the journey was taken up in giving an account of all the west-country Friends, many of whom were known to and connected with Grace.

As Captain Verschoyle drove back to his hotel, he laughed over the adventure. This unlooked-for meeting would detain him in town another day. Perhaps it was almost a pity to have accepted it, as there would be the bother of sending a telegram to his mother. However, it was done, so it was no use regretting; and then he thought 'How pretty that girl is! I don't think I have seen another such face since I returned to England. I like her manner too, half shy and childish, and then suddenly becoming most prim and old-fashioned. I wonder at women having anything to do with such plain dress, and peculiar bonnets; and yet I don't know if I should

have admired her as much in the flounces and furbelows the girls deck themselves out with now ; her very quaintness is half the charm. Her eyes are lovely, and can't she make them speak too ! By Jove ! I should think she makes the hearts of all the *thees* and *thous* in the community palpitate pretty considerably.'

Whether in this respect Captain Verschoyle's speculations upon Dorothy's charms were strictly correct, does not appear ; but certain it is, that one man seemed to have found out that he had a heart since those brown eyes had met his,—not with the shy coy glances they gave to Charles Verschoyle, but with a fearless open gaze straight into his own.

Josiah Crewdson had been home a week, though it seemed to him a year—a year of long separate days, every hour of which increased the growth of his love for Dorothy Fox. The time which, before he saw her, was willingly devoted to business was now given most grudgingly. He was obliged to make an effort to shut out the bewitching face which tormentingly came between him and the long rows of figures he used to run up with such fluency and skill. Alas for poor Josiah ! now that he knew the pleasure life could give, there was no more contentment in the joyless existence he had formerly known.

He had given great offence to his sisters by his strict reticence with regard to his visit generally, and to Dorothy in particular. The Miss Crewdsons enjoined silence as a virtue to be especially practised by Friends. But it is not in the nature of women, even Friends, to be other than specially curious regarding those of their sex of whom

they have heard much, and seen but little. The beauty of Patience Fox had been acknowledged, and her daughter was said to be more than equal to her in personal favour ; therefore, though Josiah would have been severely rebuked had he dwelt upon Dorothy's fair face, Jemima and Kezia itched to give that rebuke which their brother's taciturnity *compelled them to withhold*. *Josiah* answered ' Yes ' or ' No ' to any question they put to him, but he volunteered not the slightest information, until Kezia was driven to say that concealment and mystery led to discord among families, and was a thing which their father particularly warned his son against. But the arrow fell aimless in its attempt to loosen Josiah's tongue.

Jemima then tried her hand, and remarked, that it was a pity Josiah had gone to see the Foxes in such a spirit, as, by his own showing, had failed to produce a favourable impression upon Dorothy, who was doubtless a woman of discernment.

Then, to their great astonishment, Josiah turned upon them, told them to mind their own business, and leave him to manage his affairs. What he thought of Dorothy, or what she thought of him, concerned themselves alone ; and he did not want it made a subject of general or domestic conversation. But if they wanted to know what he thought of Dorothy Fox, he would tell them in a few words. And here Josiah's florid round face became crimson, and he stammered and stuttered so violently, that he had to jump up suddenly, and seize his bed-room candle. Between the futile attempts his unsteady hand made to light it, he managed to get out : ' She's the best,

and the most beautiful, and the most clever, and the sweetest girl I ever saw in all my life ; and I hope she will marry me, and then I don't care for anything else or anybody.' Having delivered himself of this broken speech in favour of the lady of his love, Josiah banged the door behind him, and left his sisters speechless with astonishment at his extraordinary and unwarrantable effrontery.

For once in their lives the Miss Crewdsons seemed to become absolutely limp. Had they heard aright? Were they in their senses? Could these words, still ringing in their ears, have come from 'that boy Josiah?'

'Oh, Jemima !' Kezia at last found breath to gasp out, 'if father had been alive !'

'Then he'd never have dared to do it,' answered her sister ; 'but there's more in this than meets the eye, and unless I am mistaken thou wilt find Dorothy Fox is a bold, forward girl, and no more fitted to be the wife of our Josiah than—than thou art.'

And then a solemn conference ensued, as to the best way of rooting out the 'flesh and the devil,' two evils which had evidently taken hold of Josiah. One thing they both decided upon, and this was not to mention the subject again to him, for the present at least, but to preserve towards him a demeanour indicative of great injury and unwonted severity.

So the next morning, when Josiah, somewhat abashed at his unusual boldness, tried to make amends by being specially attentive to his sisters, his amicable endeavours met with no response. Whenever they supplied any of

his wants at breakfast, they did so with the air of those who don't say they hope, but shall be surprised if, they are not heaping 'coals of fire' upon the transgressor's head. And they sniffed their rather long noses, as if those organs were being gratified by the fumes rising from the retributory process.

Josiah drove into Leeds a trifle more dispirited perhaps than usual, but not so disconsolate as he had been wont to be after former ebullitions of the family temper. Now, at least in thought, he had some one to turn to. Surely, surely Dorothy would learn to love him. She had told him she liked him; and Nathaniel said that that meant love, only it was the way of women not to speak openly of their feelings; and this Josiah, by experience, could understand. He knew how impossible it was for him to tell her what he wanted to say; but if she only felt it, and would give him a little encouragement, he could say all that now seemed lying heavily at his heart.

So the day and its duties went on, and Josiah strove with all his might to bend his energy to his business, and not allow himself to give one thought to Dorothy.

When the Cloth Hall was closed, he threw himself into his well-worn office chair, looked at his watch, found it was past four o'clock, gave a sigh of relief, thought of Dorothy, and wondered if she was thinking of him. Perhaps so. She would be most likely working; or he pictured her near the old yew-tree—her favourite seat—reading, for he knew nothing of the letter then on its road, telling him of her journey to London.

Fortunately for Josiah, he has no magic mirror, by

whose aid he can see Dorothy, or read her thoughts. If he had, he would have found they were not only far removed from him, but given to another ; and for that other Dorothy (though she would have fairly denied the charge, and would have been shocked at the accusation) had been spending more time in the arrangement of her hair and the adjustment of her plain dress, than she had ever done before ; and, worst of all, when it was completed, she was never more dissatisfied with her appearance. If she had only some bit of colour about her, she knew she would look better. So she picked from the box outside the window a piece of scarlet geranium, and held it up against her dress ; then, after a guilty look around, she stuck it for a moment in her hair—how pretty it looked there ! But a sudden horror of her vanity seizing her, she pulled it hastily out, smoothed the place over with her hand, and ran half-way down-stairs, then back again, picked up the flower, and demurely came down with it in her hand.

Grace was at the door, just setting off to drive the ponies down to the station to meet Captain Verschoyle.

She nodded to Dorothy, and thought how pretty the girl looked, as she stood in front of the handsome old-fashioned house, watching the carriage until it was out of sight.

CHAPTER XIV.

FRYSTON GRANGE.



HE house of John and Grace Hanbury was one of those houses built at a time when people who lived twenty miles from London were as completely country-folk as the present dwellers in remote parts of Cumberland or Cornwall.

The railway had completely altered the people, but it had left the little town very much as it found it. What was the use of building shops when most of the inhabitants went to London for all their household purchases? Then land for fresh residences could not be bought, as Fryston was encircled by a royal forest, on whose borders stood John Hanbury's house,—a long, rambling building, with walls covered by a net-work of ivy, climbing up until their straggling sprays even reached and twined round the quaint chimneys. The windows opened on a lawn dotted over with pine trees, and here an old fir, there a cedar, farther on a fantastic willow. From between the trees the

distant landscape opened, revealing Warleigh and the Kentish hills, led up to by a rich display of timber in all its verdant stages.

John Hanbury was the only son of a wealthy merchant. His father had given him a liberal education, had sent him to travel for a couple of years, and had been delighted to find when his son returned that his heart was still faithful to his boyish love, Grace Fox, whose aunt had married Mr Hanbury's younger brother.

Grace was a great favourite with old Mr and Mrs Hanbury, who, though they strictly conformed in every way to the rules of the Society of Friends, had no objection to the more liberal notions of their son and his wife. Nothing pleased the old couple better than to see gathered round their son's table the best society that their part of the country afforded, and to be present at any festivities given at the Grange. So that the house Captain Verschoyle was going to differed in no respect from one belonging to the circle in which he generally moved, with the exception that it realized the word home, and within its walls presented a picture of thorough domestic happiness, such as it had never before been his good fortune to witness.

Before the pony-carriage returned to the Grange, Mrs Hanbury had contrived to make Captain Verschoyle know, without seeming to tell him, the position her husband filled as a corn merchant in the city.

Grace understood better than Patience the distinction many people made with respect to position. She knew that Captain Verschoyle was aware her father was a

tradesman, and she wished him to understand that her husband was also in business.

As they approached the house the trees attracted his attention, and, in answer to his praise of them, Grace said, 'We are very vain of our trees ; I display them with great pride of heart to my father, who always tries to take me down by reminding me of that wonderful yew hedge they have at King's-heart. You went there, I think ?'

'Yes, and I never enjoyed an afternoon more. What a charming woman your mother is, Mrs Hanbury !'

'She is, indeed,' replied Grace. 'I think her the sweetest, most lovable woman in the world ; and Dorothy will be wonderfully like her. I am but her step-daughter,' she continued ;—'not that I believe her own child loves her better,—and, mingled with my love, is so much gratitude for never letting me forget my own mother, and never letting me remember that I was motherless.'

'I can quite fancy all that of her,' said Captain Verschoyle. 'When my sister and I saw her and Miss Fox standing together, we thought they formed one of the most perfect pictures we had ever seen.'

'Dorothy, you know, is very young, and from never having seen strangers, rather shy and reserved ; but she is a dear child to us who know her.'

'She is very beautiful,' replied Captain Verschoyle ; 'and my sister, who has a passion for dress, took it seriously to heart that Miss Fox could not be attired in a certain very *recherchée* toilette, which she considered invented for her particular style of beauty.'

Grace laughed. 'I dare say you do not think I am

a Friend, or rather a Quaker, as you would term us. My husband and I consider the singularity of dress a distinction no longer necessary; but my dear father pins his faith to a broad-brimmed hat and coal-scuttle bonnet; and we were terribly afraid he would insist on Dolly wearing one of those frightful things. But he pretends to look upon her as still a child, though I believe his heart failed him at the idea of hiding her sweet face under such a disguise.'

'And yet how pretty she looks in the plain dress she wears!'

'True, but she would look fifty times prettier in a more becoming one. I intend trying to induce them to give way a little in that matter while she is with us.'

'If you succeed, you must allow me an opportunity of judging of the effect,' said Captain Verschoyle, laughing.

'Certainly. This is our house.'

They entered the gates, and drove up to the door.

'They seem all to be in the garden,' said Mrs Hanbury; 'shall we go and find them?' And stepping through the library window, they walked across the lawn; where, before they had gone many steps, they met Patience, who gave Captain Verschoyle a warm greeting.

'And where is Dorothy?' asked Grace.

'With the children; I left them all romping together, as I want to write to thy father by this post.'

'You must see my children,' said Grace, and she and Captain Verschoyle proceeded down a side walk into a sort of wilderness, where a sudden turn brought them in

front of Dorothy seated on the grass ; while the two little girls adorned her hair with daisies and poppies. She sprang up in great confusion, and before speaking to Captain Verschoyle began to pull out the flowers.

‘Oh ! Aunt Dorothy, please don’t,’ cried both the children.

‘No indeed,’ said Captain Verschoyle, ‘it is a pity, for they look so pretty,’ and he took her hand, holding it for a moment. ‘Do let them stay, Miss Fox, they are really most becoming.’

Just at this moment the groom came to ask his mistress if he was to go for his master, or if she intended driving down herself.

Grace hesitated, and Captain Verschoyle said, ‘You are not allowing me to detain you, Mrs Hanbury?’

‘If you do not mind, and Dolly will take my place and do the honours, I think I will go to the station for John. I always like to meet him if possible.’

‘Then I hope you will not allow me to keep you. If Miss Fox will consent to take charge of me, I will endeavour to be as obedient and docile as a—’

‘Friend,’ put in Grace, laughing.

‘Well, a Friend—though I intended to say a lamb.’

‘Synonymous terms,’ she cried, as she prepared to leave them. ‘And in your case we will transpose the motto, and call you a Friend or sheep in wolf’s clothing.’

‘What does Mrs Hanbury, mean?’ he asked, turning to Dorothy.

‘Because thou art a soldier,’ she said, looking at him shyly.

'Oh, I see—of course, Quakers don't like fighting. Then do you not like soldiers, Miss Fox?'

'We know it is wrong to shed blood,' she replied, looking very demure; 'and I do not hold with soldiers' principles.'

'Neither do I, as a rule,' said Captain Verschoyle, smiling at the little Puritan's manner; 'but that is not answering my question. If a soldier hadn't any principles, would you dislike him—the man himself; I mean?'

'I—I never knew any before I saw thee;' and Dorothy's brown eyes looked up with a coy expression, that made Captain Verschoyle think them fifty times more lovely than before; and he said, 'Then am I to understand that you have based all your dislike to my profession on me?'

This time Dorothy looked up with a smile, saying—'I never said I disliked thee, but I think it is a great pity thou art a soldier, to fight with and kill thy fellow-creatures.'

'Oh! I am not at all a blood-thirsty warrior,' laughed Captain Verschoyle; 'I am a dreadful coward: indeed I am not sure that I did not run away whenever I saw the Russians approaching.'

'Run away!' exclaimed Dorothy. 'Oh! I am sure thou art far too brave to do that; none of our soldiers ever ran away.'

'But would not that be the right thing to do? You know I shall not be able to carry out my character of being a Quaker if you do not tell me how I am to act.'

'But thou art not a Friend. Thou must not call us Quakers,' she said, looking archly at him for a moment, and then dropping her eyes suddenly, making her com-

panion repeat to himself, 'How lovely she is! It is the sweetest face I ever saw.' Then with the irresistible desire of making her look up again he said, 'But if you would try, you might make me one. I am sure you must have converted very many people.'

What could he mean? Dorothy felt it was something more than his words said; and in the confusion that suddenly oppressed her, she began pulling off the leaves of her geranium, which after all she had pinned (or rather salved her conscience by allowing Rosie to pin) in her dress.

This pretty bashfulness, with not a trace of *gaucherie*, only increased Captain Verschoyle's admiration. It was something entirely new to a man who had generally been met half or more than half way on his own ground. A flirtation with such an entire novice had a freshness which gave new zest to the somewhat hackneyed amusement. He felt himself entire master of his own position, and that feeling too being new, he was pleased with himself, and doubly pleased with his pupil.

To Dorothy's untutored ears his little commonplace compliments and every-day speeches sounded like some sweet music which searched her heart, and awoke and stirred up feelings which before lay slumbering and unheeded.

'You are spoiling your bouquet,' he said; 'poor flowers! give them to me. Here is a Marguerite for you to try your fate upon. *You* know the way, do you not?'

'No; I have seen a picture of Marguerite with a daisy in her hand; but I did not know—'

‘What! not know,’ he interrupted, ‘that she was trying to see how much she was loved?—Ah! you have tried that often.’

‘Indeed I have not.’

‘Now, Miss Fox, will you look straight into my face, and tell me to believe that you were never interested enough in any one of your devoted admirers to care to what state of desperation you had driven them?’

Poor Dorothy! without looking up, she felt that he was looking fixedly at her, and that it was impossible to raise her eyes from the ground; then a thought rushed through her mind—could he, by any possibility, know anything of Josiah? and her face crimsoned at the suspicion.

‘Ah!’ said Captain Verschoyle, ‘I knew you must plead guilty.’

‘No,’ stammered Dorothy, trying to be unconcerned, and to treat it as a joke, ‘I do not plead guilty.’ Then raising her face without looking at him, she said, ‘I never tried it, or even heard of it before.’

‘Then I will teach you. Hold the flower in your own hand, so; and now you must think of somebody who loves you. That is very easy, is it not? But you too must care a little, or you will have no anxiety as to the result. Now give me your hand, and pull off that leaf, and say after me: “He loves me, passionately; indifferently; not at all;” at each sentence a leaf, and the last leaf decides it.’

‘Passionately!’ she exclaimed, looking up with a radiant face.

‘I knew it would be that,’ he answered.

‘How couldst thou know? thou—thou couldst not tell who I meant.’

‘Still I knew. Now you will see that mine will come “Not at all;”’ and he commenced pulling off the leaves: ‘“Passionately;” “Indifferently;” “Not at all;” “Passionately;” “Indifferently;” “Not at all.” There, did I not tell you so?’

‘Oh! but they are not true,’ she cried; ‘try another.’

‘No, I have no need to try, after what you say; I am only too happy in hearing that it is not true.’

Before Dorothy could speak, Grace and Mr Hanbury had turned into the walk.

‘Here you are at last,’ she exclaimed. ‘I could not imagine where you had wandered, and I began to think whether I ought not to feel anxious; but John, who is one of those unpleasantly matter-of-fact persons, calmed me by the prosaic observation, “that people always found their way home about dinner time.”’

Mr Hanbury and Captain Verschoyle shook hands, and they all turned towards the house; Dorothy silent, and glad that no one asked her to talk.

Was she waking from a dream that some charmed tongue had lulled her into? Waking to the consciousness that she, Dorothy Fox, had forgotten her principles, let slip her scruples, and laid aside her maidenly reserve; and towards whom? for what? Towards a stranger, a—a soldier; for vainly did she pretend that no name was in her thoughts when she pulled the leaves off the flower. She resolved to hold more guard over herself, and to remember the testimony she was called upon to bear. But

before she had finished rearranging her dress, she was recalling each word that Charles Verschoyle had said, and as she stood regarding herself critically in the glass, she wondered if he liked people with fair hair. She hoped so ; and then a prick of conscience made her turn away, until she soothed herself by thinking that perhaps, after to-day, she should never see him again ; and, at the thought, she gave an involuntary sigh.

By the time John Hanbury and Captain Verschoyle arose from the dinner-table to join the ladies, each man had said to himself of the other : ' This is as good a fellow as I have met with for some time.'

When they entered the drawing-room Mrs Hanbury was playing some of the ' Lieder ohne Worte ' to her mother and sister.

' Don't stop, Grace,' said her husband, going up to the piano ; ' I dare say Captain Verschoyle will not object to a little music.'

Captain Verschoyle expressed his great love for music, stopped to hear Mrs Hanbury for a few minutes, and then sauntered over to the place he had fixed upon when he first came in—the chair next to Dorothy.

' You play, of course, Miss Fox, and sing, I know, like a nightingale ? '

' No, I have never learnt,' she answered.

' Never learnt ! why, how is that ? I thought learning the piano was considered as necessary for young ladies as learning to read and write.'

' Father does not approve of music.'

' Do you know,' said Grace, ' that *I* never learnt until

after I was married ? John taught me my notes. I verily believe our most serious quarrels were over those minims and crotchetts.'

'Ah, thou wert very stupid,' said Mr Hanbury.

'Thou wert very impatient, and would vex me by making me learn scales instead of tunes. I wish father would let you learn, Dolly ; you used to have a capital voice.'

'I wish so too,' replied Dorothy. 'Mother begged for it,' she added, turning to Captain Verschoyle ; 'she does not condemn music.'

'I am quite sure of that. What a sweet woman your mother is, Miss Fox ! I am quite in love with her. You are wonderfully like her.'

The inflection in his voice made Dorothy's heart beat, but she determined to conquer this time ; so she answered, 'There is nobody in the world like mother. I was so amused when thou mistook Judith for her, but Judith was quite angry with thee.'

'And well she might be. I cannot fancy what induced me to commit such a stupid blunder.'

'Oh no ! it was not stupid ; we all love dear old Judith, but mother—' and she stopped, her sweet eyes expressing the love it seemed impossible to speak.

'What will you do when you leave her ?' said Captain Verschoyle, asking the question that first came uppermost, in his desire that the lovely face should not be turned away from him.

'Leave her !' she repeated ; 'what dost thou mean ?'

'I mean when you are married. You intend to marry some day, do you not ?'

Again the vexed feeling took possession of Dorothy that he had heard something of Josiah Crewdson.

‘I—I don’t know,’ she said.

‘But *I* know; and who, I wonder, will be—or perhaps is—the enviable man fortunate enough to secure your love?’

‘Nobody!’ cried Dorothy, defiantly; ‘I do not care for any one, nor shall I.’

‘Hush, hush!’ laughed Captain Verschoyle, amused at her earnestness! ‘don’t let me hear such treason. Here is Miss Fox,’ he said, turning to Grace, who had joined them, ‘declaring she never intends marrying for love. I tell her it is too cruel to announce her decision. Notwithstanding, we know by sad experience that women have struck against being troubled with hearts in our day.’

‘Captain Verschoyle!’ exclaimed Grace, affecting to be horrified by his remark, ‘oh, this is a stigma we will not sit calmly under! Come, mother, come, Dolly, let us combine our forces, and defend our woman’s nature.’

‘Vain, utterly vain, my dear Mrs Hanbury; for, has it not been proclaimed in every matrimonial market-place throughout the land, that the god of Love is dethroned, and the god of Riches reigneth in his stead?’

‘And yet,’ said Patience, ‘thou wilt find that as of old, so now there remain still, thousands who have not “bowed the knee to Baal.”’

‘What you say may be true, Mrs Fox,’ replied Captain Verschoyle, laughing, ‘but I only wish you would tell me where to find these idealistic young ladies, willing to share our joys and sorrows and our small incomes.’

‘Where !’ exclaimed Grace ; ‘ why, every nice girl you meet would do so for the man she loves. You know it is all very well putting it upon us women, but when a man says, “ I cannot ask her to give this up for me,” is it not the echo of, “ I cannot give it up for her ? ” Of course, I do not mean that a man without an income, or any prospect of making one, is to ask a girl to share nothing because they love each other ; no honourable man would do that. What I condemn is, the name of wife and help-mate being separated. Don’t you think that two people will love each other better, and be more to each other at the end of five or ten years, struggling together, than if they had lived apart, discontented, and rebelling against Providence for not being kinder to them ? Eventually they marry, but by this time perhaps they have ceased to be necessary to each other. At all events, the wife will have lost some of the sweetest memories a woman can recall, in having lessened the anxieties and eased the cares of the man she loves.’

‘ Spoken like an oracle, Grace,’ said John Hanbury. ‘ Should business fail, thou shalt go about advocating the rights of women.’

‘ I know nothing about our rights,’ she answered. ‘ I take our position from what we were created for, and therefore, what to the best of our abilities we ought to fulfil. “ God said, It is not good that man should be alone, I will make him an help meet for him,” and He made woman. I am quite contented with that. Educate us well, and so completely, that we are fit to be companions, confidants, and advisers to men ; but defend us from

being fellow-students, rivals in examinations, and compeers in professions.'

'I quite agree with thee, Grace,' said Patience. 'From that very day when woman's (so-called) rights are established, her influence will decline.'

Captain Verschoyle gave a comically rueful look as he exclaimed with a sigh, 'Well, all I know is, I wish some nice girl would only fall in love with me. I am sure she would turn me into an awfully nice fellow. There,' he continued, 'is Miss Fox smiling at such an idea. You think the thing impossible, do you not?'

'Yes,' she answered, responding to her thoughts, and not thinking how her reply might be taken.

'That's right, Dorothy. Uphold your principles by always speaking your mind,' said John Hanbury laughing.

'Oh, but, John, thou must not—I meant—'

'No, no, never mind!' replied Mr Hanbury, 'let Captain Verschoyle read it his own way; for you and I have read of the pride that apes humility, have we not, little Dolly? and we have heard of "Early to bed and early to rise," and not only so, but we are told "to practise what we know."'

'That is a shabby sort of way of informing us that thou art tired, John Hanbury,' said Grace, rising. 'Will nine o'clock be too early for you, Captain Verschoyle?'

'Oh no.'

'Then, good night.'

'Fare thee well,' said Patience.

'Good night, Mrs Fox; good night, Miss Fox; in order that you may sleep peacefully I will try and forgive you

that thrust at me, although my vanity will, I fear, never recover the terrible blows it has received to-day.'

Dorothy coloured. 'Thou hast nothing to forgive,' she answered, 'because thou didst not understand what I meant.'

'Oh, very well! Then I shall expect a further explanation. Good night.'

The next morning, before Captain Verschoyle left Fryston Grange, it was arranged that when he came again to town he should pay the Hanburys another visit. Grace and Dorothy went as far as the station with him, and while Mr Hanbury was receiving some household commission from Grace, Captain Verschoyle said,—'Miss Fox, you must not run away before I come again. Remember, I have not had that explanation yet.'

'Thou must please promise me to forget it,' she answered, gravely.

'So I will if'—and he paused until Dorothy looked up inquiringly—'*thou* wilt promise not to forget me.'

The whistle of the train sounded, there was only time to jump in. 'Good-bye,' 'Good-bye,' a wave of the hand, and Captain Verschoyle and John Hanbury were on their road to London.

Grace and Dorothy re-seated themselves in the pony carriage, and were very near home, when the former said,—

'Why, surely, my Dolly has lost her tongue. What is the child thinking of?'

'Thinking of!' echoed Dorothy—'me—oh, I do not know.'

Then fearing that this speech did not entirely agree with her principles always to speak the plain truth, she said, as fresh colour mounted to her cheeks—‘ At least, I *do* know ; I was thinking of Charles Verschoyle.’

CHAPTER XV.

A PIC-NIC AT DYNE COURT.



N the fifth morning after Captain Verschoyle left Dyne Court, Mr Ford did not make his appearance at the breakfast table. His man came to say that he was not quite well, and would be glad if Mr Dynecourt would go to him when it was convenient to do so.

Mr Dynecourt found the old gentleman threatened with an attack of bronchitis. 'Mr Dynecourt,' he said, 'I sent to ask you to do me a favour. That is, while I am detained in my own apartment, will you act in my place, just consider our friends your guests, see they have all they want, and that they are happy and comfortable? I dare say I shall be all right in a couple of days, and in the mean time you must ask the ladies to pay me a charitable visit here, and cheer me up a little.'

Mr Dynecourt consented, sat and chatted with Mr Ford, and then, at his desire, went to look after the

arrangements made for the day's amusement. Another pic-nic had been decided upon, and Mr Ford would not hear of its being put off on his account. 'And be sure,' he said, 'that you look after my favourite, Miss Audrey, and see she does not over-exert herself; we allowed her to do too much last time.'

Each one was both concerned and sorry to hear of their host's indisposition; but Dr Morcambe assured them it was nothing; only, with Mr Ford's experience of how much depended on prompt caution, he was acting most prudently, and the result would be seen by his joining them in a few days.

Lady Laura had intended doing violence to her feelings by forming one of the party, that she might look after her son's interests, and not permit any *tête-à-tête* between Miss Bingham and Mr Dynecourt. Now her plans were suddenly altered, for, of course, she must stay with Mr Ford. 'I shall read the paper to him,' she thought, 'and talk about Audrey.' By the way, she must go and see him before they set off. 'How provoking of Charles to leave just at this time, completely throwing that girl at Mr Dynecourt! Audrey must contrive to keep them apart, secure his attentions, and leave Miss Bingham to the curate; no harm can come of that, for the man has not a word to say out of the pulpit.'

Thus decided, her ladyship proceeded to her daughter's room, and found her arraying herself in the muslin dress that on the former occasion she had refused to wear.

'That is right, my dear; that dress is quite nice enough for *now*. You must go and see Mr Ford before you start.'

I think I will go up, and say you are so concerned you wanted to stay at home, but I knew he would be uneasy at depriving you of any enjoyment ; or, perhaps, you had better say it yourself. Of course, you will offer to remain, though you need not do so really, because I think it will be better for me to have a quiet day with him.'

'I shall not only offer to remain, but I shall willingly do so, if it gives Mr Ford any pleasure,' returned Audrey. 'I am going up now to sit with him until it be time for us to go.'

'Then, after you have paid your visit, I will pay mine. I hope there will be no necessity for you to remain at home, as I believe I could do much more by bearing him company ; and, Audrey, just see that Mr Dynecourt does not take possession of Miss Bingham. If you can manage it, secure him for yourself ; if not, join them whenever you see him attempt to stroll off with her. Charles may never have another such opportunity, and, though from his obstinate stupidity he deserves to lose her, it would be a great annoyance to me.'

'Very well,' replied her daughter, 'then I am to sacrifice myself, and engage the companionship of Mr Dynecourt as much as in me lies.'

'Exactly so. You need not put yourself out of the way to make yourself agreeable.'

'Certainly not,' said Audrey. 'Do not fear ; I will endeavour to place the young man and myself on a proper footing.'

She went off smiling to herself, and knocked at the door of Mr Ford's private sitting-room.

'Now this is very kind of you, my dear young lady, not to stand on ceremony, but come up like an old friend.'

'I want to know if I can do anything for you,' said Audrey. 'Will you let me stay and read to you? I have had very little experience, but I think I can promise to do as much nursing as you require.'

'What! and deprive everybody else of the pleasure of your company! Why, I should never dare to meet their angry faces again. No, no! you go and help my friend Dynecourt in entertaining the rest, and then I shall rest contented, being certain all is going on well.'

'Mamma is coming to offer herself as a companion,' said Audrey. 'You know she does not care for pic-nics.'

'If I am not depriving her of enjoyment, I shall be delighted to see her; and when you come back you will tell me of all you have seen and done?'

'May I come and make tea for you?' said Audrey; 'or would it be too much worry?'

'On the contrary, I only stay up here to secure myself against draughts, and talking too much; but if you will promise to come and see me, I shall look forward to a pleasant evening.'

After a little time she bade him good-bye; went down and told her mother Mr Ford would be pleased to see her, adding, 'I am going to make tea, and spend the evening with him, and give him an account of our day.'

Lady Laura was delighted. 'Nothing could be better. It is just what I should have managed myself. Really, Audrey, you have a great deal of me in you.'

Audrey checked the answer she was prompted to

return, bidding her mother adieu at once, that she might not be tempted to give vent to a little sarcasm which she found hard to repress.

Miss Verschoyle rendered such strict obedience to her mother's wishes, that she and Mr Dynecourt were companions the whole day long. Mrs Winterton, Miss Trebusis, and the General had arranged a wonderful botanical search. Miss Bingham and the Rev. Robert Kirby (whose loquacity would have disgusted Lady Laura) followed their example, and, they said, their footsteps, but their fates did not permit them to meet—a circumstance which did not seem to affect their enjoyment in the least. On this occasion they were all pedestrians, and certainly, from the time after luncheon when they separated themselves into three sets, each had but a very hazy notion of the other's movements.

With Geoffrey Dynecourt the day sped swiftly. At first he would not question himself too closely as to what this new, delicious feeling might be,—not deep enough yet for him to be distracted by doubts, or tormented by fears. He only knew, that wherever Audrey was he was content to be. He could listen to her, talk to her, and, at the end of hours spent together, he would sigh because the time to leave her drew near. Constantly he wondered whether she shared in these impressions. He knew she always met him with a smile of welcome, seemed pleased when he joined her, sorry when they parted, and, by many a soft look from those wonderful eyes, showed her interest and sympathy. In imagination he clothed her with every grace: every pure and noble feeling a

woman could possess he freely granted her. He seemed to have enshrined her in a sanctuary, and dared not, even in thought, approach nearer her than the outer courts, where he could gaze upon her image.

Incapable of disguise where his feelings were concerned, Audrey soon noticed the almost reverential manner Geoffrey at times assumed towards her, and, instead of laughing to scorn the good he imputed to her, she felt a strange wish that he might not be undeceived. She said to herself that she wanted him to think well of her, and she tried in every way to strengthen the impression, until he felt himself hourly becoming more intoxicated by her witchery.

Could it be that she felt the same influence? If not, why did her eyes soften when they met his, and her voice sink as if its tones were tuned for his ears alone? Oh, she had given him signs which, unless love had been the prompter, would never have been visible in one so proud, so noble, so far exalted above any ideal he had ever before formed of woman-kind.

The whole of that day Audrey had been thoroughly herself, and devoid of all arts, save such as were natural to a girl who desired to please. That desire seemed to spring from an entirely new impulse.

‘What a happy day I have spent!’ exclaimed Mr Dynecourt.

‘And yet you are sighing,’ said Audrey in her soft voice.

‘Yes: sighing because it is over. Are you not sorry when a great pleasure comes to an end?’

‘Has it been a great pleasure?’ she asked. ‘Last time you would not go with us.’

‘Last time you went, remember how little I knew of you.’

‘Oh, that is all very good, but I only know your staying away made me cross.’

‘And now, would you care if I stayed away?’

Audrey did not answer for a moment; then she intended giving some laughing reply; but, when she met his eager gaze, she gave him a long look of loving reproach, and the quick blood mounted to her cheeks.

‘Oh, Audrey! Miss Verschoyle!’

But, before he could say more, she exclaimed—‘There is Miss Bingham! I am so glad we have met them. Let us hurry on that we may return together respectably, after having lost our chaperones.’

Miss Bingham, who had a little wholesome dread of her aunt, remarked, ‘We will not say we have only just met.’

‘Certainly not,’ replied Audrey; for from the terrace Lady Laura advanced to meet them smiling delightedly, and kissing her daughter in acknowledgment of the visible obedience with which she had followed her instructions.

‘And have you had a pleasant day, my dears?’

‘Oh! a charming day!’ exclaimed Miss Bingham.

Audrey and Mr Kirby expressed the pleasure each had enjoyed. Only Mr Dynecourt was silent. He could not make out Audrey’s manner; the evident wish to hurry on and join the others; the sudden change from the low soft

tone, which spoke so much more than the words, to one of raillery and banter. Why should she laugh at Miss Bingham, tease Mr Kirby, and pretend that all the time they had been absent Mr Dynecourt had been most anxious about them? It jarred on him, until he wondered what it could mean. It fell like a cloud over the past, and he seemed to discover the first trail of the serpent in the Eden of his love.

'Just as I expected,' thought Lady Laura; 'he is annoyed at having been kept from Miss Bingham all day. If I had not foreseen this, there is no knowing what mischief might have been done; for I have no doubt, in her heart the girl is a little piqued at Charles leaving; and, of course, his rival would make capital out of that piece of stupidity. Nobody could believe that a son of mine would do such a thing.'

As she looked up to say something more, she noticed Audrey turn round, and seemingly (for they were too far off for her to hear) ask for some flowers Mr Dynecourt was carrying. He gave them to her, and then she returned a few sprays of the heather to him, which he received with a somewhat stiff bow.

'The bear!' said Lady Laura, as she dropped her eyeglass; 'he evidently cannot control his temper, and is stupid enough to show his mortification. Well! I am not surprised; for I fancied he was not overstocked with sense, when I heard some Quixotish tale of his having given up his property to pay the debts, as if he could not go on as his ancestors had done.'

Marshall, as she dressed her young lady, speculated

upon what had gone wrong at the pic-nic: generally Miss Verschoyle gave her the benefit of her triumphs or disappointments.

‘I shall not wear any ornaments to-night, Marshall;—put some of that heather in my hair, and give me a bunch of it to fasten here. That will do.’

‘A red rose would look much better with this white dress, Miss; heather does not show any colour at night.’

‘Never mind—do as I tell you.’

‘Oh! you are dressed,’ said Lady Laura, opening the door. ‘Then go and arrange my toilette, Marshall. I will come to you in a few minutes.’

As soon as the maid had departed, Lady Laura began her questioning, confiding to her daughter how necessary her caution had been;—‘for I never saw more evident displeasure than Mr Dynecourt displayed.’

‘About what?’ said Audrey.

‘Why, at your not allowing him to walk with Miss Bingham. Did he contrive to be alone with her much?’

‘No, I do not think he spoke to her unless I was present.’

‘Excellent! You are getting quite a diplomatist, Audrey.’

‘What a pity that you should only discover my talent when I have no further need of it!’

‘What do you mean, my dear,—no further need for it?’

‘Why, surely, if I marry this rich man, I shall be able to afford to be as straightforwardly frank and unpleasantly candid as I please; there will be no need for deceit or *fourberie* then.’

‘My dear, don’t speak of Mr Ford as “this rich man ;” it does not matter with me, of course, but it is a bad habit to get into.’

‘Oh ! is it ? I thought you honoured people by naming what you valued them for.’

Lady Laura fancied from her daughter’s tone that a discussion had better be avoided ; so she said—

‘I have not seen much of Mr Ford alone ; for Dr Morcambe stayed to luncheon, and after that he had letters to write. He seems to be very much better, though. One thing I discovered—he has no relations, except distant cousins ; so, of course, his estates would be left to his wife, if he died without children.’

‘Did he say so ?’

‘Now, my dear Audrey, is it likely I should speak on such a subject to him ? I was thinking, perhaps, you had better be rather agreeable to Mr Dynecourt, because through him you will easily get to know all the desirable people in the neighbourhood.’

‘Do you really think so ? You know,’ she added, in a tone of sarcasm, ‘that he has lost all his money, and calls himself a beggar ?’

‘Oh yes ! I don’t want you to make a great friend of him ; still, he might be of service.’

‘Then you may depend upon my cultivating him ; but, remember, I consider you responsible for all that may come of it.’

‘Why, what could come of it, Audrey ?’

‘Oh, I cannot tell : such very odd things happen sometimes to penniless people. Though when they be-

long to the *crème de la crème*, they have no excuse for not behaving better.'

'My dear Audrey, you are very odd this evening. Are your spirits depressed? You had better have a little sal-volatile. I shall send Márshall with some; for there goes the first dinner-bell, and I have to dress.'

Miss Verschoyle did not join the ladies. After dinner, she sat alone in her own room, rather puzzled as to how she had displeased Mr Dynecourt; for she saw something had gone wrong. Though she wore the heather they had picked, he mounted none; and she had given him a spray expressly for that purpose. She had a great mind to take hers out of her dress and not wear it any longer; and then she smiled to think her tact was rather at fault.

But the smile soon died away, and she got up, and resolutely ended her reverie by proceeding at once to Mr Ford's apartments. He was sitting in readiness for her; and Audrey, knowing that the most certain way to insure his amusement was to get him on his favourite topic, began asking him—after she had told him how far they had walked, where they had taken luncheon, and how sorry every one was at his absence—as to the history of an old church in the neighbourhood, which Mr Dynecourt had mentioned to her.

This involved sending for several books, getting some photographs, &c., until tea arrived, and Audrey sat down to make it.

Just then there was a knock at the door, and Mr Dynecourt presented himself.

'The very man I wanted to see,' exclaimed Mr Ford.

‘Now, Miss Verschoyle, what do you say to my inviting him to join us “in the cup that cheers, but not inebriates?” Have I your permission?’

‘Most certainly,’ she returned, politely.

‘Oh, I came with a message from Lady Laura to Miss Verschoyle,’ said Mr Dynecourt, hesitatingly; ‘but when I have taken back the answer, if you will permit me to return, I shall be so delighted;’ and he looked appealingly at Audrey for a little further invitation.

During her absence, all his annoyance had vanished, and he was now alternately blaming his bad temper, and wondering why it had been aroused. How absurd that he had become irritable and unreasonable, simply because she had suddenly changed her manner! Now he longed to see her, to show her his penitence. What an ill-mannered fellow she must think him! She would be disgusted with him, and perhaps think no more of him. .

Thus exaggerating his own offence, as he had hers, he proceeded to the drawing-room. As he feared, she was not there; but, fortunately for him, Mr Kirby had been obliged to leave, and Miss Bingham was sitting alone. She beckoned him at once to her side to ask him if General Trefusis had made any comments on their losing his party.

To prevent the conversation reaching Mrs Winterton’s ears, it was carried on nearly in a whisper: so that when Lady Laura entered the room, the first thing she noticed was the two heads in alarmingly close proximity; and her fears were further aroused by Miss Bingham getting very red as her ladyship came suddenly upon them.

'You are looking so tired, love, don't you think you would be wise to come and sit in this nice easy-chair?'

'No, thank you, Lady Laura: this ottoman is very comfortable, and I am not tired.'

Lady Laura said no more. She sat down by Miss Trefusis, and began telling her of some wonderful ferns her cousin, Lady Honoria Camden, had collected. Still she kept her eyes on the two delinquents, who again settled into their *tête-à-tête*.

Miss Trefusis explained some peculiar mode of rearing ferns an uncle of hers had adopted; and when Lady Laura exclaimed, 'Now, you must tell me all that over again; for I shall write every word of it to Honoria tomorrow,' she naturally supposed that her ladyship was greatly interested. So she was in manner; but her thoughts were concentrated on the couple opposite.

'I can see he does not want to be interrupted, by the anxious way he keeps looking at the door,' she thought; 'and I do not like to see her so very talkative and confidential.' Miss Bingham's story of how she nearly tumbled into the brook from an immense stone turning over, and how Mr Kirby sprang to her assistance, fell on the ears of a listener as deaf to her tale as Lady Laura was to the explanations of Miss Trefusis.

All Geoffrey Dynecourt could think of was, whether Audrey would come down before she went to Mr Ford, and, as he was almost certain she must have gone to him by this time, what possible pretext he could find for joining her.

Imagine then his joy, when Lady Laura suddenly broke

in upon Miss Trefusis by saying, 'But will that mode apply to all ferns? would it suit the—the—dear me! have forgotten the name, that beautiful tall spreading one What can its name be? how stupid I am!'

'Oh! it suits them all,' returned Miss Trefusis.

'Yes, dear; but I must be certain about this one, because Honoria would never forgive me for misleading her and these—what is their name?—they are her especia. favourites. Now, Audrey would remember in a moment. How tiresome! for I might write perhaps to-night.'

'Then in her sweetest tone she said, 'Mr Dynecourt, would it be asking you too much, just to go to Mr Ford's room, and ask Audrey if she would tell me the name of that fern we admired at Lady Honoria Camden's? I would not disturb you, but I want to write about it particularly to-night, and I cannot remember the name. I will entertain your companion until you return.'

He could not believe his ears, and was so taken aback at the sudden realization of his hopes, that he almost stammered out his acquiescence.

'Ah! as I thought, very unwilling to go! But you don't come back here, my friend,' and by a dexterous movement of the chairs, she contrived that should she be obliged to relinquish his seat, which she had taken, there would be a vacant seat on the other side.

Ten minutes elapsed, and then Mr Dynecourt returned, saying, 'Miss Verschoyle thinks you must mean the *Os-munda*, but she does not know; and will you excuse me, Miss Bingham, as Mr Ford has asked me to sit with him this evening?'

‘Dear girl !’ inwardly exclaimed Lady Laura. ‘That is very good of her to be so thoughtful of Charles ; for of course it was her suggestion. One thing, she is perfectly secure of the old man ; and perhaps she is right not to see too much of him alone, for her temper is very peculiar. In that she takes after her father. Well then ! now there is no need for further exertion on my part. I wonder, though, what made him accept the invitation ? Mr Ford may have lent him money ; or perhaps he may have some scheme of his own to advance ; but whatever it be, I think if he pits himself against me, he will have to cry “halt” before long.’

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SPRIG OF HEATHER.



HE little tea-party, as old-fashioned Mr Ford called it, was a success. 'I don't think I have enjoyed anything so much as this for a very long time,' he said; 'we all look so homely.'

'There is something delightful about tea,' replied Audrey, 'it always makes one so confidential. I remember when I was a child, and Marshall's friends came to tea with us, how I used to open my ears, and be entertained with their gossip. Those times are the only pleasant recollections I have of childhood, except Charlie's holidays, which were always a series of red-letter days. A London child without companions has not many pleasures. Except at her luncheon, which was my dinner, I seldom saw mamma. My mornings were spent with my governess, and the rest of the day Marshall and I battaled out together. She was very good to me,

and when I was ill, I could not bear her out of my sight. Poor mamma always hated a sick-room, and kept away from us when we were ailing with any child's complaint, fearing it might turn out to be small-pox, which she has a dread of.'

'Did she really?' said Mr Ford; 'dear me! I can remember how my good old mother used to wait upon me hand and foot, if my finger only ached. Father was very well while nothing was the matter; but any one who was sick went to mother.'

'Had you any sisters or brothers?' asked Audrey.

'Yes, my dear; but they all died early. So did my father and mother, and I was left alone in the world before I was twenty.'

'Loneliness is a feeling which causes us many a heart-ache,' said Mr Dynecourt.

'Very true, but my back ached too often in those days to indulge in any such reflections. There is no cure for sorrow like employment.'

'I quite believe that,' said Mr Dynecourt. 'When I am idle, I see life in a new light, with nothing but its greys, browns, and neutral tints.'

Audrey looked at him. 'Oh, not now, Miss Verschoyle; I never saw so much rose colour before, and I really was in great need of it, for I was very gloomy when I came here.'

'Now, that speech has done me more good than anything I have had to-day!' exclaimed Mr Ford; 'and it is very kind of you to say it.'

'It is much kinder of you to give him the occasion for

saying it,' laughed Audrey, taking out some knitting she had brought with her. 'Now, Mr Dynecourt, entertain us, tell us some story or adventure ; in short, be amusing.

'I cannot ; I am too happy.'

'Does happiness, then, take with you the form of silence ?'

'This does ; I am afraid to speak lest I should break the spell.'

'In that you are wise. My motto is, "Enjoy all you can in the present without asking or expecting anything from the future."

He was about to answer her, but she put her finger to her lip. She had spoken in a low tone, and Mr Ford seemed wrapt in his own reflections, from which he roused himself, saying, 'Really we are not very talkative ; a Quakers' meeting.'

'Did you ever know any Quakers ?' asked Audrey.

'Yes, I have known several.'

'Were they all very nice, good people ?'

'Oh ! I fancy much the same as other people are, some good and some bad. I have only known them in the way of business, though, and must say I have always had reason to think well of them. Why do you ask ?'

'Because of two gentle Quakers I met this summer in Devonshire, a mother and her daughter ; we became acquainted through an adventure my brother had ;' and she related the circumstance of Captain Verschoyle's faintness, of her curiosity, and the visit they paid to King's-heart. 'You would have been charmed with them, Mr Ford, they were so simple and unaffected ; quite

different from any people I ever met before. The daughter was sweetly pretty, and had such an artless naïve manner, that I seemed to be an old woman compared to her. Then it was so strange to hear them call us Charles Verschoyle and Audrey Verschoyle ; somehow all traces of stiffness vanished, and we were like friends of long standing when we parted. I should very much like to see them again.'

'Perhaps you may. Plymouth is not so very far off ; and if you spent one happy week there, why not some time or other try another ?'

'I told Charles I should go there to spend my honeymoon.'

'Even that may be accomplished,' said Mr Ford, looking smilingly at her. 'I have never been to Plymouth, but I have often heard of its beauties. Was it the scenery you admired so much ?'

'I did admire the scenery ; but I believe the happiness I enjoyed really came from myself. I was quite contented, ready to be pleased with everything, and then so glad to be with Charlie.'

'But,' said Mr Dynecourt, 'would not any place be charming under such circumstances ? What happiness equals that of being with those we love ? You should have put your delight at being with your brother first, for from your love to him came contentment and the readiness to be pleased.'

'I do not know that,' she replied ; 'and if so, the question is how long would this tranquillity remain ?'

'With you, for ever.'

‘Why do you say, “with you”?’

‘Because I think you *different* from many other women, who might place in the other scale money and luxury ; but I am certain neither of these would compare, in your eyes, with love.’

She did not look up from her knitting as she answered gravely, ‘You have formed, I fear, a wrong estimate of my character. No one values the good things of this world more than I do.’

‘Yes ; but you value love more?’

‘I have never set higher value on any love which I have experienced.’

‘But in thought, in feeling, you know ; you imagine—’

‘I very seldom indulge in imagination ; I am afraid I am very matter-of-fact.’

‘There I must differ from you, my dear,’ said Mr Ford ; ‘you have, I think, a very imaginative nature. Your education may have caused you to look upon many things as so necessary to your comfort, that rather than give them up you would repress the luxury of great domestic happiness ; but, I believe,’ he added, looking fixedly at her, ‘if you consented to marry one for whom you did not feel the affection which under other circumstances you would freely bestow, you would be guided by duty and try to make him happy.’

‘I hope I should, I think I should,’ she said, raising her eyes with an effort, for she could not reply with that graceful ease which at other times was natural to her.

‘Let us hope you will never have such a trial, Miss Verschoyle,’ said Mr Dynecourt.

'I do not think it would be a trial to *me*.'

'Not a trial to spend your life with one who had not your whole heart—one who could give you nothing but fine clothes and jewels, and could win nothing from you in return but duty or scanty gratitude! I know you are only saying this for argument's sake; but even in jest I do not like to hear it from *you*.'

'Then I will be silent,' she said gently; 'only you must neither of you attribute too much goodness to me, for I fear I have a large measure of coarse clay in my composition. I have made peace because I want you to do something for me. Look at this skein of wool.'

Mr Dynecourt came nearer to her, and seated himself on a footstool, while she wound the skein into a ball. The two made a charming picture. Their faces contrasted well—her dark hair, and eyes full of vivacity and fire; his thoughtful face, earnest and almost grave in expression. Sometimes they were silent, then a merry quip or jest would come, or the wool would get into a tangle, and cause much accusation, reproach, and defence.

Their host looked at them, and repressed a sigh. If he carried out his intention of asking her to be his wife, what could he give her to compensate for that which then she would be deprived of? He had no doubt that whenever he offered himself to her she would accept him. He saw through her mother's plans, and estimated her character exactly. He was not blind to Audrey's love of money, show, position; but under all this he caught glimpses of her true nature, and believed her to be true-hearted, loving, and unselfish. And as his eyes turned

again upon the two, he thought how pleasant it was to be young, and to be able to inspire love for one's self alone. Ah ! all that was buried and gone for him ; he sighed audibly.

Audrey turned quickly, saying, ' You are tired, Mr Ford, and we are thoughtlessly making too much noise.'

' No, my dear, I like to see you merry. I have spent a very happy evening, and have to thank you both for it. It has been like home to me, and that is what I often sigh for, even in my own house. I was not born to grandeur, and sometimes it is rather irksome to me.'

' You must let us come again,' replied Audrey. ' I think it is time for me to leave you ; Dr Morcambe will scold us if we let you talk too much, so good-night, and to-morrow I hope to see you almost well.'

' Good-night, my dear,' he said, taking her hand, ' good-night.'

' I will see you to your room,' said Geoffrey ; ' or will you return to the drawing-room ? '

' No, I shall court some beauty-sleep to-night,' and they went out of the room together.

As they crossed the corridor leading to her apartment, Mr Dynecourt said suddenly, ' Miss Verschoyle, have you pardoned my ill-temper ? '

' What do you mean ? ' she asked ; ' I have nothing to pardon.'

' Yes, you have.'

' Well, then, you are forgiven,' she said smiling to him.

' Give me that heather as a token, that when you are gone I may feel happy.'

‘What have you done with the spray I did give you? Have you lost it or thrown it away, for you did not wear it at dinner?’ and she looked up saucily in his face; but her eyes fell before the gaze she met, as he said, ‘Yes, I did; but I put mine nearer my heart than you did yours. Give me that bunch to—to keep with the rest.’

‘No, I cannot; I must say “good-night” to you, or some one may see us.’

‘And if they did, and knew for what I was asking, would— Oh, you must see whose image fills my heart! I cannot hide it from you longer, and yet I dare not tell you. Give me those flowers if I have any hope,’ and he held out his hands imploringly.

‘Hush, hush! they are coming out of the drawing-room. I dare not stay. Good-night.’

He held her hands so tightly for a moment that the pain forced her to look up and see his face, so ashen in its paleness, and then he let her go, and they parted.

No one was in the room, and Audrey threw herself into her chair. She mused a little, and then said to herself, ‘Audrey Verschoyle, I think you and I had better have a little conversation together. Do you intend being mistress of Dyne Court, or do you prefer to lose the chance by making a fool of yourself with a man whom it is impossible for you to marry? Yes, impossible; don’t let there be any mistake there. All your life you have striven to secure a good match, and hitherto you have been disappointed. Now the prize is in your grasp, all your desires are within reach; there is a fair prospect that the wealth you have sighed for will soon be offered to you.

What do you intend to do ? To accept the old man, and marry him, of course. Yes ; but it is very hard not to enjoy a last flirtation before liberty goes. I need not disguise matters. If I could indulge myself, I would fall in love with Geoffrey Dynecourt ; and he—I think he is beginning to care for me. Why do I feel so much compunction for this man ? I never cared before what others suffered. I always said, I can take care of my heart, and other people must do the same. What is there about him ? He is not cleverer or better-looking than dozens of men I have met before, and yet he makes *me* different. I never feel tired of being with him. I blush like a school-girl when he looks at me ; and I find myself thinking about him much oftener than is at all necessary. In such circumstances, most people would say, the less I saw of him the better. Would it be possible for me to fall seriously in love with a penniless man ? Most decidedly it would not. I should only return to the old life of keeping up appearances, to the everlasting envy, hatred, and malice which fill my heart. I almost wish I had never seen him. I find my heart is not quite dead yet, there is still a little weakness left in it ; but my will is stronger than my heart, and I can control myself thoroughly, and I know that when this last spark is extinguished there will be nothing to rekindle. Had I not better let it burn itself to ashes ? for love is the only luxury which Mrs Richard Ford will require to deny herself. He will marry, I dare say, and then no doubt I shall laugh at the absurdity which made me cast a thought at poverty when I have secured wealth. I said I need use no disguise to

myself, and yet what a hypocrite I am ! for in my heart of hearts I know if I loved as I could love, I would throw prudence and Dyne Court to the winds and share the fortunes of the man I had chosen. But, thank goodness, I have no such feeling to contend with. I have made my election, and as I see that he is taking our—our flirtation too seriously, I must show him his error. At all events, I will give him no further encouragement.' And she ended her reflections by ringing for her maid.

Lady Laura came in, shortly after, with Captain Verschoyle's letter, saying he would return at once. This had put her ladyship into excellent spirits. 'I shall be so glad to have that responsibility off my hands, for Mr Dynecourt's attentions are becoming rather pointed ;' and she gave an account of the drawing-room scene, coloured after her own vivid imagination.

Audrey knew that it was not true that he had hung over Miss Bingham's chair and devoured every word she said, while she, in her turn, had coquettled and blushed with delight at his speeches. Yet it annoyed her, made her feel uneasy, and as if she would like to revenge herself upon him for it.

So she said she was very tired, and did not require Marshall any more, and bade them both 'Good-night.'

Then she drew aside the curtain and looked out on the moonlit scene, and her heart leapt up for joy to see some one gazing at her window. A moment after she thought, 'How imprudent of him ! some one else might notice him. Oh, that is all right,' for she sees he is smoking and walking to and fro.

On such a lovely night, what more natural than that the late owner should moodily pace up and down, keeping company with his bitter reflections? Audrey could see his face by the moon's light, and it was pale and sad. Was this to be wondered at? Surely fate had dealt very hardly with him—had taken all and left him nothing. Pity and love flew towards him from her heart, and forgetting all her new-made resolutions, she gently opened the window, and the next time he came under it a sprig of heather fell at his feet. Audrey only waited to see him pick it up, passionately cover it with kisses, and almost before he could look up she had gone. Seeing her face in the glass she said to herself, 'Ah, well may my face be red! But I think I had better not indulge in more reflections to-night.'

CHAPTER XVII.

PLAYING WITH EDGE TOOLS.

GHILE Geoffrey Dynecourt built castles in the air, in which he and Audrey were to dwell happily together for ever ; and Audrey Verschoyle half-courted, half-thrust aside the new feeling which possessed her, because it was at once so sweet and so bitter, Richard Ford sat musing over his fire. In his hand he held one of those so-called portraits cut out of black paper, very common at one time. It was a likeness of his dead wife, and as he sat gazing on it, his memory took him back to the day when it was made, nearly forty years ago. What a happy day they had, and how proud he was of his pretty Patty ; and she —why, she thought the king himself second in everything to Richard ! Ah ! how they had toiled together—Patty, never cast down, but always looking at things in a bright light. They used to call those their hard days, and speed their passing by making plans for the future, when the

summit of their ambition would be gained, and they would possess a little home in a country place, such as Willesden or Hampstead, where they would keep fowls, and have a garden, with a bower where he could smoke his pipe, while she sat working at his side. By the time they were able to accomplish this, Patty was sleeping in St Clement's churchyard. Oh ! if God had but been pleased to spare her. Ten years were such a short time to be together ; and what hardships she had borne during those years ! She might have married so much better, too, over and over again. There were Carter and Page both dying for her, and her old father threatening all sorts of things, if she did not give up that penniless Dick Ford ; but not she ; and when times were hard, and he told her he ought never to have brought her to poverty, how she would hang about him, and tell him she was happier than the richest lady in the land ! And the fire looks all blurred, as the old man with dim eyes nods his head, saying, 'She was an angel ! She was too good for this world !' But how he had changed since those days ! why, he wasn't like the same man. Patty herself would hardly know him, among so many grand folks, quite one of them too, and made as much fuss about as if he were a lord. Money was certainly a good thing, though it lost half its charm when you had nobody to share it with ; nobody to leave it to. He was only turned sixty. Many a man after that age lived to see a goodly family spring up around him. Yes, he must marry ; it was his duty ; his position seemed to demand it of him, and certainly nowhere could he find one better suited to be his wife than Miss Vers-

choyle. He knew he should often vex her by mistakes in speech and manner ; he knew, however pleasant her society might be to him, he was but a poor companion for her. He said to himself, he was not supposing for a moment, that when she married him, it would be for aught but his money ; and then he thrust aside something which asked whether, when the riches she desired were her own, she would not sigh for freedom ; would she not come to regard him as a burden from which death alone could free her ? No, no ! he must have common sense, and not expect to be loved like a young man ; he must be content with respect and esteem, which he believed Audrey would always accord to him. And another thing in his favour was his belief, that on love merely she set little value. Had it been otherwise, surely she would have long since secured what must have been frequently offered to her. So he decided that he would wait until his other guests had departed, beg Lady Laura to remain another day, and then ask Audrey to be his wife.

Before Miss Verschoyle and Mr Dynecourt met again Audrey had seriously taken herself to task for giving way to her imprudent impulse. She never raised her eyes when she said 'Good-morning ;' nor did she return the pressure he gave her hand. She complained that she had a headache, and therefore took her breakfast in silence. She knew Geoffrey Dynecourt was watching her, by the alacrity with which her wants were anticipated ; but beyond these attentions, he did not intrude himself upon her notice ; and he allowed her to leave the breakfast-room without following her.

Some fears, and a shade of disappointment, did trouble him ; but he pressed them down with the heather, lying warm at his heart, sweet token that she loved him ; for, after having asked the heather as a sign, she would surely never have thrown the precious gift to him, unless her love was all his own.

Oh ! how bitter it was to him now to know that his house and lands were in the possession of a stranger ! For her to be mistress over that which had hitherto held the first place in his heart, would be happiness indeed. The idea that this loss could make any difference to her in giving him the love he longed for, never once occurred to him. True, he had hardly dared to hope for such a treasure. He had nothing that *could make her love him*. He was not half good enough, or clever enough. Had he been a duke or an earl he would have asked her love as humbly as he did now, and have thought himself as little worthy of it. That such a priceless gift could be bought, could be bartered away for money, never occurred to him. To him she was a very Una, walking unharmed and unsullied amid the world's snares.

In the fortnight they had spent together at Dyne Court they had seen more of each other than they could have done in years of ordinary London visiting life. Audrey soon knew that the sage maxims with which she generally favoured her companions would be distasteful to this man, with his exalted ideal of what woman should be, and his belief that in her he saw the reflection of the image his fancy had painted. She had made the most of the mornings spent together, when Mr Ford was in company with

his steward. Every evening while the gentlemen sipped their wine, from which prosy ordeal Geoffrey made an early escape, the two wandered together through the shady avenues ; hushing their voices, because all around was so still, saying little in words, but by every lingering look and half-drawn happy sigh, telling a tale more eloquent than the most ready speech ever told, and tightening each look and mesh of the net, from which one at least never wished to escape.

Circumstances had prevented Geoffrey Dynecourt from seeing much of fashionable society. Except when he was a very young man, he had never had a positive flirtation ; consequently he was quite unskilled in that dangerous warfare of art and coquetry so generally indulged in. He only knew that he had disguised nothing from her, who had aroused these new feelings in him, and all he had offered she had accepted. The refusal to give him the heather was the first positively painful doubt which had crossed his mind, and while his heart was yet cast down, hardly daring to hope again, and battling with despondency, the prize fell at his feet, and proclaimed him victor.

To Audrey such a character as Geoffrey Dynecourt's was entirely new. Playing at love-making had been one of her earliest accomplishments, and she had generally found the men she had practised her arts upon equal to herself in the knowledge of these pleasant deceptions. True, it had happened that at times one of the combatants had been wounded ; but what mattered that to the other ? it only showed off his or her superior skill, and one consolation there was—the hurt was a mere scratch

which would soon be healed, and leave the sufferer wiser than before. It was well known that no deception took such an earnest form as when two people knew that nothing could possibly come of it. Audrey used to declare no flirtations ever equalled those with ineligible men and younger sons—‘the others said their heart-broken speeches and rapturous compliments with fear and trembling, doubting lest in some underhand way you might take advantage of them. They therefore took fright and went off like rusty muskets when you least expected them.’

Had it not been for the certainty that she was to marry Mr Ford, Audrey would have had no qualms of conscience about the earnest looks, the lingering adieux, the low-toned conversations ; but she wished to retain Geoffrey Dynecourt as a friend after she married. ‘And I am rendering that next to impossible,’ she thought, as she sat in her room reflecting on the previous night’s episode ; ‘for old men’s wives had better not choose their friends from former lovers ; “Pity is akin to love,” and Mrs Richard Ford must live without either of those soft sympathies. It is of no use sitting brooding over it,’ she continued, rising hastily. ‘I had better take a stroll, and exorcise this dark mood. I hope no one will see me go out, and I’ll get a good spin, and come back better pleased with myself perhaps, and the world generally.’

While putting on her hat she wondered how she could get out into the walk which she saw from her window. ‘I think there must be a door at the bottom of the side staircase, or how did he get there last night ? I’ll try.’ Her efforts were successful, and, as she gently closed the

door, she congratulated herself that no one had seen her depart. She did not hear a heart leap up, and a voice say, ' My darling ! I knew you would come here to meet me.' She did not see the passionate eyes that had waited so long for their light to appear, now lovingly rest upon her. She did not know that Geoffrey Dynecourt was following her, exulting more and more, as he saw her turn towards the ' Saint's Well,' for was not that the place where all true lovers went to pledge their vows ?

' A place for lovers, and for lovers only,' seems best to describe ' St Hieretha's Well,' shaded as it was from the glaring light by trees, whose branches lovingly entwined and interlaced each other. The moss-covered ground formed a carpet, on which two fantastic old stumps stood side by side, fashioned into a rude sort of elbowed seat ; ferns flourished in rich luxuriance, peeping out from every nook and cranny ; and a fringe of hartstongue lapped round the tiny pool of water, where hung the mystic cup, dedicated to the lips of true love alone.

Audrey had never been here before, and to her hot, chafing spirit, the cool retreat was welcome indeed. It was impossible to turn her back at once on such a quiet rest ; she must sit here awhile and ease her burden of discontent. So she took possession of the seat, but before many minutes had passed, the man whose presence she at that moment least desired stood before her, knelt by her side, took both her hands in his, and looking into her face, said, ' Audrey, my darling ! ' Then a great wave seemed to sweep over her heart, and she recognized one before whom she was awed and abashed. The words she

would have spoken died away upon her lips, as he put his arm round her, saying tenderly, 'We have no need of words to tell our love, our hearts have spoken to each other, and made their choice before they even whispered to us their sweet secret. Oh! Audrey, my own, how good God has been to me! I had been doubting Him because I had lost worldly riches, and all the time He was going to give me you, a precious treasure that the whole world must covet; making you love me, when I thought I should have to worship you afar off all the days of my life. How could I dare hope for any more? You who might choose any one! Nay, dearest, it is true. I had no right to dream of being chosen by you; but since you love me, and have said you will be mine, I walk upon air!'

'No, no!' were the first words she found power to utter.

'Not in words; and, darling, do not think I presume in saying so. Oh! Audrey, I will beg, entreat for every word and look! No slave ever more humbly asked a great boon at his master's hand than I will at your feet. It is only because I know, come what may, you have given me your heart, that mine refuses to be silent, and *will* proclaim aloud its passionate delight.'

She made a great effort to free herself from him, and regain her self-possession.

'Mr Dynecourt, we have—that is, you—are mistaken.'
'Mistaken!'

'That is, I mean you have taken things too seriously. I—I never intended,' and she stopped, seeing the agony of suspense he was enduring.

Still he clung to hope.

‘Miss Verschoyle,’ he said in a penitent voice, ‘I have been too sudden. I should have waited for *you* to speak. You think, perhaps, I make too little of your love ; have dared to call it mine too readily. Oh ! if so, forgive me. I will wait ; I will be silent ; I will not speak of it again until you bid me. No task you impose shall be too hard, if it is to win one word of hope from you. I was intoxicated with delight, and did not know what I said. Tell me you forgive me !’ and he tried to take her hand again.

‘I have nothing to forgive,’ she said humbly : ‘it is you who must forgive me ; but I—I never thought you—you were serious,’ and she hid her face in her hands.

In a moment he had taken them away by force, and exclaimed in a harsh voice, ‘Look straight into my face. Now tell me, did you mean all the time to deceive me ?’

‘I—I never thought——’

‘I do not ask what you thought ; but when you looked into my eyes with love, was it to cheat me ? When you answered my half-spoken words in your soft low voice, was it to mock me ? When you threw me this heather and bade me take hope, was it to deceive me ?’

‘It was,’ she said, and her face blanched like his own.

He flung her hands from him, and hiding his face, groaned aloud in his misery. The tears came slowly dropping from Audrey’s eyes, and she could not help laying her hand on his bowed head.

‘Mr Dynecourt, pray do not give——’

He started up. ‘Do not touch me !’ he cried passionately. ‘What ! you have tears too at your command ?

You can play at pitying your victim? Oh, you are a cunning sorceress! Are you satisfied with your power? Shall I delight your heart further by telling you how your charm has worked? that before I knew you I was only sore at heart because I had lost the place where I and all my race were born; saddened because strangers had a right to the house in which my mother died, and my father reared the only thing he had left to him. When I worked and toiled, hope was yet alive within me that some day I might have a loving woman to make me forget these trials. I met you. You know how you made me forget everything but your presence. I dreamt I had found the noblest, best, truest-hearted being ever permitted to bless earth with her presence. If you had not returned what you saw I was obliged to offer you, I should have gone from you humbly, knowing I was not worthy of you, and all my life you would have been my ideal of perfection. Now you have stranded hope; it lies dead within me, and with it faith, and trust in womankind. Let *your* heart rejoice, for you have left *me* nothing to live for. Go on to bewitch and cozen other dupes. Oh, you must have a happy life!

Audrey's spirit was roused. 'You have no right to speak to me as you have done,' she said; 'if I have injured you, I am sorry; but how was I to know you were different from other men? I met men who played with me as you say I have played with you, and then laughed at the ignorant simplicity which made me suppose they meant anything serious to a girl without a penny. In the world, poor people such as we are, can-

not afford to love. We may play at love, but we must marry for money. I am of the world, brought up in its ways, versed in its deceits. How could I think you looked upon me as a fresh loving girl? Every one in the house could have told you what brought me here.'

'They have told me that you intended to marry Mr Ford, and I have laughed the idea to scorn.'

'You need not have done so; it is quite true: and whenever he chooses to ask me, it is my intention to accept him.'

'No! Audrey, not that; anything else. I could bear to see you happy, but not to degrade yourself.'

'Degrade myself, Mr Dynecourt!' she said bitterly; 'according to your showing, it is the man who marries me will bear the degradation. Mr Ford has wealth; that is all that such as I can possibly desire.'

'Then tell me one thing: if we had met under other circumstances, and I had possessed what former Dynecourts did, and had asked you to be mine, would you have said yes?'

She hesitated a moment, and then fixing her eyes upon him, answered, 'With all my heart.'

'Then I thank God for having taken it from me. I rejoice that I am as a beggar in your sight. Had all England been mine, I should have pleaded my cause as humbly as I did to-day; but now that I find your love is only a thing put up to the highest bidder, I am grateful to Fate for compelling me to stand aloof from such barter. The old lands of Dynecourt have indeed changed hands, when they are to be reigned over by such a mercantile

mistress. Farewell, Miss Verschoyle; your sex may thank you for having so effectually taught me their true value. I hope when you are the wife of Richard Ford, you will find happiness in the riches you so devoutly worship; as for your husband that is to be, I am sorry for him; the good old man deserves a better fate.'

He was gone, and Audrey stood motionless where he had left her; the echo of his bitter parting still ringing in her ears, and falling like a dirge upon her heart.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HARRY EGERTON'S ADVICE.



JOHN HANBURY and Captain Verschoyle parted at the Shoreditch Station, the former going off to his business, the latter to Madame Roget's to inquire after the commissions from his mother.

Not caring to be stuck down in the country with 'a lot of stupid people,' as he called them, he had made up his mind to run down to Darington to see his old friend and godfather ; and as a preliminary to this he at once wrote, informing him of his being in London. To Captain Verschoyle's surprise, Mr Egerton presented himself at his club the next afternoon.

The satisfaction it gave the old gentleman to see his godson again safe and well, and the evident pleasure it was to the young man to meet him, prevented Mr Egerton from giving way to his usual acerbity, beyond his saying in the gruff voice which made those who did not know him think him in a furious passion—

'When the mountain wouldn't come to Mahomet, Mahomet went to the mountain ; and I am fool enough to do the same.' Then, thinking this speech had rather betrayed his genuinely warm feelings and real motive, he added, 'But don't think *you've* brought me up. No, no ! I've come to give that vagabond shoemaker a little of *my* Queen's English ; and, by the great Mogul's imperial cat's eyebrows, if he makes me another pair of his nigger-cut boots, with as much heel as toe, I'll—I'll——' and here he brought down his fist upon the table, making the very furniture rattle—' kick the fellow round his own shop with 'em, sir !' Then he put his arm into Captain Verschoyle's, saying, 'Come along with me to Conduit Street, and tell me what you're up to for the next few days.'

'Why, when I have despatched that box and a letter to my mother, I am entirely at your service.'

'Humph ! then you're precious hard-up for money or companions, I know. Well, stop and do your business, and I'll go to Conduit Street by myself ; and after that we'll try and be jolly, though I don't know what's the way in these days, when everybody is hedged in on all sides, and you can't drive a coach, and you mustn't fight a duel. My stars ! what a set of Lady Fannys you men have been turned into !'

Harry Egerton—as, in spite of his seventy years, all who knew him still called him—was what people term a character. Those who met him for the first time always asked what made him so brusque and cynical. Why did he sneer at everything and everybody, and why had he never married ? His oldest friend could not have given

a satisfactory answer to one of these questions. In his day, he and Lascelles Verschoyle—Charles Verschoyle's father—had been young sprigs of fashion, sworn friends, and constant companions. Then they parted for two years—saw nothing of each other ; and when they met again, Colonel Verschoyle had married, which altered him considerably to all but his old chum. Harry Egerton had perhaps met with a disappointment. Certain it was that something had soured his temper, altered his manner, and somehow changed his whole life. He never married, spoke in cutting terms of womankind in general, and year by year became more peculiar. Withal, however, he retained his old friends, and was looked up to by the younger men, who could generally bear testimony to the liberality of his heart and purse, notwithstanding the sharpness of his tongue and temper.

Charles Verschoyle was his especial favourite, his godson, and his future heir ; not that the old man had much to leave beyond the inconvenient, old-fashioned house, some few miles out of York, where he lived up to, ~~and~~, as he said, beyond, his income ; and where he gave a hearty welcome to the men who chose to come and stay there without bothering him, or expecting more entertainment than a day's shooting or hunting, and a plain bachelor-dinner when their sport was over.

Many had tried to find out the secret which had seemed to influence his life ; but all had failed. If there was any story connected with it, he kept strict guard over it, until many believed that his eccentricity lay in his peculiar disposition, and his great love of ease and quiet.

Of course, he wanted to know all about Captain Verschoyle's personal experience of the war. Most of the afternoon was spent in answering questions and describing actions, until, when dinner was over, Mr Egerton said—

‘Well, Charlie, and what are you going to be after now?’

‘Why, my last idea was to get married, sir.’

‘Married!’ exclaimed the old gentleman, in a tone of the greatest contempt. ‘What! are you tired of peace already?’

‘Hardly that,’ laughed Captain Verschoyle: ‘but if a man intends to take a wife, it's time he did so, at my age.’

‘Oh, certainly. Don't you prove an exception to the rule that “there's no fool like an old fool.”’

‘Come, that's not fair, and won't do,’ said Captain Verschoyle; ‘besides, an old fool wants somebody to take care of him; and, remember, although “woman in our hours of ease” may be “uncertain, coy, and hard to please—”,

‘According to your own account, *you* haven't found 'em so,’ replied the old man. ‘And, as for the rest, it's all bosh; for, if “pain and anguish wring the brow—” hang the women! Get a bottle of soda-water and a wet towel; but what's the good of me talking? Out with it; you've found an angel, of course, and you're in love. Ha, ha! while the flame's burning you don't smell the brimstone; that comes after matrimony.’

‘No, no, you're wrong; I am not one bit in love; and the young lady is far better than an angel; she is an

heiress with £50,000 of her own, besides expectations. My mother is most anxious for the match, thinking it the last chance I may get, and not a bad one either, for she is a pretty, lady-like girl ; young, and not bad-tempered.'

'Why don't you have her, then ?'

'Because I can't make up my mind that she and her money would make me happier than I am at present. I want your advice about it.'

'Oh, you do ? very well, then, I'll give it. My opinion is, that *any* man who marries at all is a fool ; but a man who waits to get advice first is worse ; particularly when he spends his time in putting the woman on one side of the scale and her money on the other. Don't do that, Charlie, my boy, or I'd rather see you married to a house-maid than to the richest heiress in England. If you must marry, marry a woman you love, and who loves you, or else keep single all the days of your life.'

Captain Verschoyle took his companion's hand, laughing heartily, as he shook it.

'There,' he said, 'I knew you'd tell me what to do. I have felt all this myself ; but you know how that cursed money tempts one. I won't go to Dyne Court again. It's rather a dull place ; and later on, if I wish it, I shall have lots of chances of meeting the young lady in London ; then, if I get to like her better, all right, I'll try my fate ; and if not, I—well, I shall have done better than if I were to go down now, when we would be constantly thrown together, and I might get philandering, and thinking I meant more than I really do.'

'Come to me at once, then,' said Mr Egerton. 'I am

going for my yearly visit to Harrogate, with old Bob Constable ; and, after that, I shall be home.'

'Very well, I will. Stapleton and some fellows have asked me down for some shooting, and when I have finished there I'll come on to you.'

So this was decided, and, a few days after, Captain Verschoyle went down to Harrogate with Mr Egerton, and remained until Sir Robert Constable arrived. He then took his 'departure, and came back to town, intending to join Colonel Stapleton's party as soon as he had made the necessary arrangements.

CHAPTER XIX.

DOROTHY'S BLUSH.

N the mean time Nathaniel Fox had joined his wife at Fryston Grange. As he could only stay a few days, he had been making the most of his time: and now that the visit was nearly over, he would hardly confess to himself how thoroughly he had enjoyed the change.

'I do wish you could stay longer, father,' said Grace. 'There are so many things I should like you to see, which I know would interest you. Now, when will you come again?

'I wish,' put in John Hanbury, 'that we could induce your father to move Londonward altogether.'

Nathaniel shook his head as he said, half comically, 'I find that I have been wisely dealt with, in not having been set down to spend my life within reach of pleasures which are very engrossing. I begin to fear that in my nature lies a love of excitement, of which hitherto I have been ignorant.'

John and Grace laughed at Nathaniel's ideas of dissipation—which meant several meetings at Exeter Hall, and visits to the Crystal Palace.

'No, no, John,' he added, 'Patience and I will return home; and in spite of all we have seen, it will not be hard to renew our quiet life, will it, wife?'

Patience smiled her reply. 'No; and we shall have much to talk about,' she said.

'That is true,' said Nathaniel. 'Dear! dear! the world progresses with rapid strides. I feel more like a spectator, than one who is born to take a share in all this;' adding, with much gravity, 'I fear I have perhaps been unduly severe towards those who are desirous to keep pace with the times. Remember, now, I do not excuse them, but I see more reason for it than I ever did before.'

John was too sensible to be drawn into any discussion with the old gentleman, knowing that once off on his hobby they might not part quite so amiably; besides which, this remark from Nathaniel was a wonderful concession, and, after making it, he relapsed into silence, fearing he had been carried away into saying rather too much.

During that same morning, Grace and Patience had been left at home together, and the former took occasion to ask if Dorothy's dress, while she stayed with them, might not be a little modified. 'I fear her present costume would rather attract attention; and if you and father did not object to her having a simple white dress for evening wear, and a plain grey silk, with a straw bon-

net, rather more fashionably made, for out-doors, I really think it would be better.'

'I was going to speak myself of this,' said Patience. 'I have already mentioned the subject to her father, and he has consented; only she must not wear colours, Grace.'

'Certainly not. You may depend upon me, mother. After what father said last night about the confidence he reposed in John and me regarding Dorothy, we shall both be most particular that she goes nowhere, and sees no one but such as we feel you would entirely approve of. There is one thing which I was going to ask you about this young Crewdson—is he an accepted lover of Dolly's?'

'Oh no!' returned Patience. 'Thy father and Stephen Crewdson always desired this union of the two families, but the fulfilment of the wish is left entirely to Josiah and Dorothy.'

'He has been visiting you lately, has he not? How did you all like him?'

'Very much indeed,' said Patience. 'I think him an excellent young man. But, Grace dear, Dorothy will never care for him; it is easy to see that. He has none of those ways which win a girl's heart.'

'I hope he is not like those dragonesses of sisters. I remember them; they were the terror of my childhood; and Aunt Caroline tells me they have stood still, and not altered in any way since.'

'Oh no! Poor Josiah is painfully bashful, and rather homely in manners and appearance. Thy father still holds to it, that Dorothy will learn to love him, but I am

convinced she never will ; and this made me, as I told thee in my letter, particularly anxious that, before she would be called upon to decide, she should see a little of the world.'

'Of course,' replied Grace. 'Why, the poor child has never had an opportunity of seeing anybody at King's-heart ; and she is so pretty, mother, and sweet, that she might win any man's love. I shall try and sound her as to how she feels disposed towards Josiah.'

'Do,' said Patience. 'With thee she may be more open.'

So, a few days after Patience and Nathaniel had taken their departure, Grace approached the subject by saying — 'Oh, Dolly, how did you like Josiah Crewdson ?'

'Very much. He was with us a week.'

'Yes, so mother said. Is he good-looking ?'

'Oh no,' replied Dorothy, laughing at the idea, 'not at all ! He is short and fat, and his cheeks are very red, and go out so.' And she puffed out her own, to give Grace some idea of Josiah's rotund countenance. 'He made me laugh every time I saw him going up a hill—he used to puff and pant like an old man. But he is very good-tempered, and he never minds what any one says.'

'For "any one" read "I,"' said Grace, smiling. 'Perhaps he thinks all you say is perfect.'

Dorothy laughed.

'He says he is very fond of me. His sisters are so cross to him, poor fellow—they never laugh or are cheerful—and his father would not allow him to speak, particu-

larly at dinner ; and do all thou canst, nothing will make him say more than "Yes" and "No." Of course he has finished long before anybody else, and then he is so uncomfortable at having nothing to do, that he eats twice as much as he wants.'

'Not a very romantic description of a lover, Dolly ; for I suppose I am to consider him in something of that light ?'

'Oh no, Grace ; at least, I have only promised father to try and like him ; and I told Josiah the same. But, for all that, I do not think of him as a lover—not that I know anything about lovers,' she said, her face getting suddenly very red. 'I often wonder,' she went on with a sigh, 'if anybody else would like me. I mean some one who—who was not like Josiah.'

Grace laughed at the simplicity expressed in Dorothy's words. 'Indeed, Dolly,' she replied, looking at the blush on the lovely face turned towards her, 'I think you may make your mind quite easy on that point. But by being not like Josiah, do you mean not a Friend ?'

The colour which had died away from Dorothy's cheeks now returned with double force as she replied very gravely, 'Grace dear, I hope always to uphold our principles, and to marry out of our own society would not surely be consistent. John is a Friend.'

'True ; but had he been of any other persuasion, Dorothy, I should have married him. A higher law drew us together—a closer tie bound us—than the mere fact that we two had been brought up to call our religious opinions by one name. But while I am sermonizing

about him I am forgetting it is time to go and meet him ; so put on your bonnet quickly, dear. I dare say we shall find he has brought the things we ordered on Wednesday.'

Mr Hanbury had the boxes with him ; and as soon as they reached the Grange their contents were displayed, to Dorothy's great delight.

' Oh, Grace ! ' she exclaimed, after they had undergone minute inspection, ' are they not pretty ? I hope I am not unduly set upon them.'

' My dear child,' answered Grace, ' don't think of such things ; look upon the enjoyment of such trifles as small womanly pleasures, allowable to beings who can set their aims and affections on higher things.'

Mr Hanbury's return put a stop to further conversation between the sisters, especially as Grace wanted to hear the news of the day from her husband, who at length said,—

' By the way, I had a note from Captain Verschoyle, asking me to dine at his club with him on Friday. Shall I accept ? '

' Oh, do,' answered Grace ; ' I should like you to go ; you took a fancy to him, did you not ? '

' Yes ; I think we both liked him.'

' Very much : I do not know when I have met such a thoroughly agreeable man.'

And the next day, when she and Dorothy were sitting together, she referred to the invitation, saying, ' I am so glad John is going to dine with Captain Verschoyle ; I have told him to ask him down here again.'

Though Dorothy only gave a grave little nod of assent, she was by no means indifferent ; her heart beat quicker,

and she seemed to be suddenly filled with a joyousness that made all around her look bright and gay. 'I wish thou couldst see his sister, Grace,' she said, after a pause, 'she is so beautiful ; her name is Audrey—is it not pretty?'

'Yes, it is an old-fashioned, quaint name. What an odd thing your meeting with them *was*, and then my mistake, and his coming here,—altogether a complete adventure. But how was it that *you* happened to be in the shop?'

'I was waiting for Judith ;' and Dorothy began to give a minute description of the event. She had forgotten everything, so interested was she in the story, when the door was opened, and a servant announced 'Mr Josiah Crewdson.'

CHAPTER XX.

DOUBTFUL PROGRESS.



URPRISED at this unexpected arrival, Dorothy started up, but stood still ; while Grace advanced to meet her visitor. All Josiah's courage had forsaken him, and he was unable to utter a word. He stood at the drawing-room door apparently in great danger of blushing himself into an apoplectic fit. He certainly did not present himself in a favourable aspect ; and Grace thought, 'The idea of any girl falling in love with him is preposterous ; we must put an end to this ;' but nevertheless she held out her hand to him, saying—

' I am very glad to see you, Mr Crewdson ; our families have been friends for so many years, that we cannot be strangers to each other.'

By this time Dorothy had recovered herself, and expressed her great astonishment at seeing him.

' Did father know that thou wert coming ? '

'No,' said Josiah; 'I had some business—at least, it was not exactly business; but I heard that thou wert here.' Then, seeing a smile on Grace's face, he added in confusion, 'Not that I came up for that, thou knowest; but I very often come to London—at least, not very often --but I have been once before.'

Dorothy was vexed at his awkwardness, and wished that he had appeared to more advantage before her sister. Grace, however, did not seem to observe it, but commenced to relate what the journey from Leeds to London used to be, and how well she remembered hearing Josiah's father speak of being attacked by highwaymen on the road. By the time she had finished, Josiah felt somewhat more at his ease, although he still sat in a most uncomfortable position on a chair just inside the door, under which he had deposited his hat.

'I hope you will have luncheon with us,' said Grace. Josiah looked at Dorothy, and Grace added, 'Dorothy will show you the garden and the forest, which are very pretty.'

'Thank thee; I should like to stay very much, if I am not putting anybody to inconvenience.'

'Not in the least. I am sure I can answer for Dorothy,' and Grace gave her a significant look to say something, for, as she said afterwards, she pitied the poor young man.

'Oh, I shall be very glad!' said Dorothy. 'Do stay, Josiah.'

Josiah's face beamed with satisfaction, and he gave a little sigh of relief.

'And come nearer the fire,' Grace continued; 'it is rather chilly to-day. Take my place, for I must speak to nurse before she goes out.'

So she went off and left them together.

Dorothy did not speak for a little; then she looked up and saw that Josiah's eyes were fixed upon her.

'Why dost thou stare at me?' she asked, looking straight at him with a half-saucy expression.

'Because I cannot help it. Oh, Dorothy, thou must not be vexed with me; but I cannot help thinking of thee all the day long. I try to forget thee, but it's of no use.'

Dorothy Fox had naturally a great deal of the coquette in her; and though she could not return Josiah's affection, it was not unpleasant to her. She had been taught to set no value on personal appearance, and to disregard every attention to dress which was not necessary to neatness and order. She had been taught to look upon fashion as the worldly name of an engrossing sin invented by the devil 'to lead captive the fancy of silly men and women;' and as for gay colours, they were the badges of slavery to this tyrant, who drew his victims step by step into a vortex of frivolous gaiety, in which they spent their youth in folly and their old age in regret.

Notwithstanding this teaching, Dorothy was truer to her nature than to her education; and the girl looked on her fair face and rejoiced, and could not check the desire to wear the pretty colours which the flowers, the sea, and the sky suggested to her.

Josiah Crewdson, assuredly, was not her ideal of a lover, still it was very pleasant to hear him say that he

could not help thinking of her; to know, as she did, that he loved her, and that this love had brought him from Leeds to see her. These reflections caused her to look down for a moment, and then to answer demurely:—

‘I am sorry that I should engross so much of thy thoughts, Josiah; and I am puzzled to understand the reason. What makes thee think of *me*? ’ and she gravely regarded Josiah, whose whole energies seemed bent upon endeavouring to pull off separately the fingers of his black-and-white silk gloves, which he had previously held so tightly in his hands.

‘Because I love thee so much, and I want thee to love me, Dorothy! Thou wilt try? If only a little, I shall be so happy. I don’t know what I am about now; I keep on doing all sorts of foolish things. I forget to send letters, and I add up figures wrong, and I don’t order the things sisters ask me to bring with me from town.’

‘Oh, Josiah! how wrong! Thy sisters have a right, then, to be displeased with thee, and there is some excuse for them when they are cross.’

‘I don’t care whether they are cross or pleased,’ exclaimed Josiah, throwing down his gloves, and coming nearer to Dorothy. ‘If thou wilt only say, some day thou wilt marry me, Dorothy, I will do everything that thou wishest, and never forget a single thing thou tellst me. But, when I think what an ugly, stupid fellow I am, and thou so clever and so beautiful, oh! I could do anything then! Why, I went into the Cloth Hall with

my umbrella up the other day. Don't laugh at me, Dorothy ; it was because I was thinking of thee, and how I should manage to see thee before the time thy father named.'

Dorothy gave full vent to her merriment, and whenever Josiah attempted to renew his protestations, he was interrupted by a fresh burst of laughter.

'How fortunate it is that thy business has obliged thee to come to London !' she said at length.

'Ah ! thou knowest thou wert my business. Kezia and Jemima did all they could to find out why I was coming, but I wouldn't tell them ; I said that I had to settle some money matters.'

'Josiah, I fear thou hast not been truthful ; deceiving thy sisters is not acting up to our principles.'

'Well, but I *can* settle some money business,' replied Josiah ruefully. 'And if thou wilt only say that thou art trying to care for me, I will tell them that I saw thee, or anything that thou thinkest is proper.'

Dorothy looked down hesitatingly, and pinched up the frill of her white muslin apron ; while Josiah kept his eyes fixed upon her with eager anxiety.

'I told thee I liked thee, Josiah,' said Dorothy at length ; 'but, of course, that is not saying I could marry thee.'

'But,' gasped Josiah, 'thou dost not say thou won't, Dorothy ?—Do say that perhaps one day thou mayest. I have never had anybody to love me, and I do love thee so much. I didn't know what love was ; but, since I was at King's-heart, I have been so miserable.'

‘Then, I am sure thou must be very sorry thou went there.’

‘No, I am not. I should not be sorry even if thou couldst never care a bit for me ; because, somehow, I am different. When I am by myself, I am not dull and stupid, such as I was before I knew thee. I can think about thee, and what I would do for thee, and how I would love thee ; and, instead of being wearied, I am quite happy, and glad when nobody is near to distract my thoughts. Dorothy, only say thou wilt try !’

‘Yes ; I will try. I told father I would try. But thou must not take that as an assurance that I mean to marry thee, Josiah, because I don’t feel at all like that. Indeed,’ she added, with a little air of despondency, ‘I am not certain that I shall marry at all. Sometimes I think I shall be an old maid, like Dorcas Horsenail.’

Josiah shook his head. ‘Thou wilt never be like her,’ he said.

‘Why not?’

‘Because,’ answered Josiah, simply, ‘those good women have not got faces and ways like thine.’

At this moment, Grace tapped at the window, saying, ‘Dolly, the children want you to have a romp with them in the garden, and perhaps Mr Crewdson will come out with you. We shall have luncheon soon, and after that we will go for a drive.’

So, until luncheon was announced, Grace took possession of Josiah, walking round the garden with him, and asking him about her old friends, and his relations, and making him forget for the time his awkwardness and bash-

fulness. She perceived the truth of her mother's remarks about Josiah. He was very amiable, but quite unable to inspire love in such a girl as Dorothy.

The drive went off so successfully that Josiah was too happy even to think about those personal deficiencies which generally formed a barrier to his peace of mind when in company. The children were friends with him at once, and Dorothy laughed, and talked to him without reserve, and to his great delight said she would like to visit his sisters. So in another month there was every prospect that he would meet her again.

Mrs Hanbury watched them until she had grave doubts whether, after all, Dorothy would not become Mrs Josiah Crewdson. She certainly gives him encouragement, thought she ; and the poor fellow has evidently lost his heart to her.

During the drive home Dorothy laughed, and teased Josiah until Grace thought that she had a very decided regard for him. She was still engrossed with such thoughts when the carriage drove up to the door, where, instead of the servant, stood Captain Verschoyle.

Had Dorothy known that she was going to see Captain Verschoyle she could not have desired to look better. The fresh air and her cheerfulness had heightened her colour, and made her eyes brighter even than usual. Captain Verschoyle thought he had never seen any one so lovely ; and, though he addressed his first greetings to Mrs Hanbury, he could hardly divert his attention for a moment from Dorothy. While Josiah was standing waiting until Dorothy should give some sign that she required

his assistance, Captain Verschoyle walked round to the other side of the carriage, and, quite ignoring him, took her hands, and, though it was not necessary, almost lifted her out, and accompanied her to the drawing-room.

For some time, the conversation was entirely about Captain Verschoyle, and how he had been spending his time since they last saw him at Fryston. Grace begged him to stay to dinner, but he said he had an engagement. 'You will have a cup of tea with us, then?' she said, and perceiving that Josiah had been overlooked, she asked him to ring the bell; saying to Captain Verschoyle, 'Our friend Mr Crewdson is obliged to return by the six train, so I can drive you both to the station, when I go for John.'

Captain Verschoyle bowed to Josiah, who, to Dorothy's vexation, took no notice of him. Very soon tea was brought in, and then poor Josiah, whose star had been gradually waning ever since this dazzling sun had made his appearance, was suddenly extinguished. Captain Verschoyle walked about, attending and talking to the ladies, and finally took his cup of tea, and drank it standing, as Dorothy thought, in the most graceful manner, while Josiah, made doubly awkward with a cup of tea and no table, and a piece of bread and butter without a plate, sat silently eating and drinking,—his coloured silk handkerchief spread over his knees.

Captain Verschoyle, after the momentary glance he gave Josiah when introduced, took no further notice of him. But, to Dorothy's imagination, he was looking at and remarking upon every small peculiarity which her

unfortunate lover possessed ; and she felt so vexed and annoyed with Josiah, that she longed to say something cross to him. But no opportunity occurred ; for except when he was particularly addressed, Josiah was dumb ; and besides, Captain Verschoyle was constantly including her in the conversation, and thus attracting her attention to himself. At length, the subject of art being introduced, he asked Mrs Hanbury if she had seen some celebrated paintings at Spencer House ?—and finding that she had not, he said, ‘Would you like to see them ? I know I can get admission, and I should so like to show them to you and Miss Fox. Will you come on Saturday ? Mr Hanbury is to dine with me to-morrow, and then we can arrange it.’

Grace said she would be delighted, and Dorothy looked so radiant, that Captain Verschoyle felt inclined to offer to take them to every gallery in London. He turned to Grace, saying ruefully, ‘Is it not too bad ? here I am in London, wanting to see all the sights, and nobody will accompany me. Have you been everywhere, Miss Fox ?’

‘No, indeed,’ replied Grace. ‘We have been nowhere yet, but John has promised to take us. I want Dolly to see all she can while she is with us.’

‘Then, Miss Fox, will you have pity on me, and get Mrs Hanbury to include me in some of her excursions ?’

‘Yes,’ said Dorothy, looking at him shyly ; ‘but thou hadst better ask Grace herself.’

‘Oh ! I shall be very happy,’ laughed Grace ; ‘but I fear our pleasures will be rather tame to Captain Verschoyle.’

‘Nothing of the kind, Mrs Hanbury; I really mean what I say. I want to see some of the London sights, and I cannot go alone. You forget how long I have been away from England.’

Josiah here took out his watch, giving Grace an opportunity of speaking to him.

‘What is the time?’

‘A quarter-past five.’

‘Too soon to be thinking of going. The train does not start until five minutes after six.’

‘I was just about to propose, if you are not too tired, that you and Miss Fox would honour us by walking to the station, and your carriage could follow and bring you back,’ said Captain Verschoyle.

‘Oh! that would be much nicer,’ exclaimed Dorothy. ‘Wilt thou do it, Grace?’

‘I am afraid I can’t, as I am a little tired; but you might go, dear. I would be at the station before the train leaves.’

While Dorothy went off to get ready, Captain Verschoyle continued talking to Grace; and Josiah dolefully thought that now he should have no opportunity of saying another word to Dorothy. Perhaps at the station she might say something to him; but on the way this man, towards whom Josiah had taken a great dislike, would doubtless monopolize her. Then he could not stay beyond the Sixth-day. He had not courage enough to come again the next day, so he should not see her. How provoking that this person should have come! But she had been kinder to him, and had promised to visit them. Still

his heart had lost its lightness ; she seemed more beautiful than ever, and he more stupid, by comparison with this stranger.

Grace was not in the room when Dorothy returned. Josiah arose, took his hat from under his chair, and stood waiting to accompany them. But Captain Verschoyle, who had decided against a third person accompanying them in their walk, turned to him as they were following Dorothy, and said—

‘I think Mrs Hanbury will expect one of us to take care of her ; so we shall see you at the station.’

Josiah was thus left alone in the drawing-room, where Grace found him, and to his astonishment said, ‘I am so sorry you thought it necessary to wait for me, you should have gone with Dorothy ; I drive down alone almost every day.’

When they all met Josiah found no opportunity to say more than ‘Farewell.’ Grace gave him a general invitation to come and see them whenever he came to town. Captain Verschoyle stood talking until the train was just starting ; then he said, turning to Josiah, ‘Do you smoke ? No ? Then, good-bye !’ and got into another carriage, and the long-looked-for meeting was over.

When Mr Hanbury returned from business the visitors were mentioned, and also the invitation given by Captain Verschoyle.

‘Hast thou accepted, Grace ?’ he asked.

‘Conditionally, dear—that thou hadst no engagement.’

‘No, if Dolly and thou would like to go, I shall be at your service.’

‘Then we will decide upon going,’ said Grace.

‘Oh! I am so glad,’ exclaimed Dorothy. ‘Is it not fortunate, Grace, that I have my new dress and bonnet?’

‘Oh, woman, woman!’ laughed John Hanbury. ‘What matters it whether thou art a strict Friend, a Parisian *belle*, or an *Indian squaw*?—nature has implanted in thee a love of adornment and dress, which no sect can overcome, and no training extinguish.’

CHAPTER XXI.

ART AND NATURE.

ELL, Audrey, you may be a very entertaining companion to some people, but certainly you never give your mother any opportunity of judging of your talents. I thought I would just see how long you would remain silent, and it is twenty minutes since you last spoke. Perhaps had I not said anything it would have been twenty minutes more before you would have uttered a word.'

‘I beg your pardon, mamma ; I was thinking.’

‘Thinking, indeed !’ echoed Lady Laura. ‘I wish you would think a little of me ; but I am the last person my children ever consider. I have ruined my health, and toiled and slaved all my life, and my devotion is rewarded with contempt and ingratitude. I know I cannot stand it much longer ; and it is very hard to bear ;’ and here Lady Laura applied her handkerchief to her eyes in a manner that threatened a scene.

‘Mamma, you have no right to say such things of us. I am sure I always try to do what pleases you.’

‘Indeed! do you? and I suppose I shall hear next that your cruel heartless brother does the same.’

‘Well, Charlie would be very sorry to vex you; but if he knew he couldn’t like Miss Bingham——’

‘Now, Audrey, if you are bent upon irritating me, I desire that you will leave the room; my nerves can’t stand it. Like Miss Bingham, indeed! I should *like* to know how long you have taken to consider matrimony in this new light? Charles knew that I used every effort to introduce him to a nice-looking girl with £50,000 of her own, besides expectations. She immediately fell in love with him, received his very pointed attentions most graciously, and then, when everything was going on smoothly, suddenly he takes some ridiculous idea into his head that he is afraid he cannot love her, and he must go away to prove his passion. Well, all the time he is absent I entirely sacrifice myself to his interests, never leaving her; and let me tell you it’s not so very agreeable to be tied down to a namby-pamby girl from morning till night: no one but a mother would do it.’

‘But, mamma, you forget you wanted Charlie to take this same girl for life.’

‘I want no argument, Audrey; and it is only your perverse temper that makes you defend him. You know perfectly well what I mean. The idea of a man in his position throwing away such a chance; and really thirty-two is rather late to begin to have these romantic feelings. I’ll never believe that his want of love is his only reason——’

the idea is too ridiculous. No, I am certain that he has some horrid entanglement, or infatuation, which will burst upon us suddenly. I am quite prepared for anything ; perhaps it's a housemaid or a cook.'

'Oh ! mamma, don't be so absurd.'

'I don't see that it's at all absurd, Audrey. After the pointed manner in which he made every one believe he was going to marry Miss Bingham, I feel ashamed to meet the people.'

'You need not, I am sure. I never saw any of this pointed attention you speak of ; he was polite to her, but not more so than I have seen him to dozens of girls.'

'Then all I can say is, you have gone about with your eyes shut. If people had been so blind as you, how was it that Mr Dynecourt, who was dying to get her, should go off the very day he heard Charles was coming back ?'

'Do you think that was the reason of Mr Dynecourt's leaving ?'

'I don't need to think about it ; it was quite apparent to every one. Mr Ford, in his good-natured way, asked young Dynecourt here to meet Miss Bingham. No doubt, when Charles went away, he thought everything was in his own hands, but he had sense enough to know that he had no chance when your brother returned, and so gave it up. I never saw any one behave more absurdly, for, of course, by going away so suddenly he made every one aware of his design.'

'As Charles does not intend to possess himself of this coveted treasure, it is a pity that Mr Dynecourt should

also be disappointed,' said Audrey in a scornful voice. 'Would it not be only fair to send him a recall?'

'It is quite immaterial to me whether he returns or not. I said to Mr Ford that I feared his young friend was a little disappointed, and he asked me if I had any reason for supposing so. He evidently did not wish it to be mentioned, as he pretended to be amazed at me for thinking that Mr Dynecourt admired Miss Bingham.'

'Who, then, did Mr Ford think he admired?' asked Audrey quickly.

'I couldn't make out,' returned Lady Laura. 'By the way, I think it is time you settled matters there.'

'So do I,' returned her daughter.

'Then why don't you do so? Surely the matter lies with yourself, and I shall be very glad to have it decided, for this disappointment about Charles has quite upset me. I feel nervous about everything.'

'Yes, it would be very hard upon you if my scheme turned out to be a failure. But there is no fear of that, mamma; I cannot afford to let likes and dislikes interfere with my settlement in life, can I?'

'Nobody with proper sense ever would allow such feelings to overrule their judgment. I am not afraid of *you* there, my love; but I think it is time to have the offer made formally, for, with that exception, I look upon it as settled. I do not see how he could draw back now if he wished, and I am sure that that is not likely.'

'I wonder if he will ever repent of marrying me, mamma?'

'Well,' returned her ladyship, with a shrug of her

shoulders, 'once married it does not matter ; but if he does he will be very ungrateful, I think. I do not know where he could have done so well. We have unexceptionable connections, and every opportunity of being in the best set, and you are very handsome, and wonderfully fascinating when you please, although you have not looked at all well this last week.'

'Have I not?—but what does it matter? When I am Mrs Ford I shall even be able to indulge in looking plain.'

'That's quite a mistake,' replied Lady Laura. 'There is no reason why you should not have as many admirers then as now.'

'Wouldn't that be rather a dangerous luxury, which even money had better forego?'

'Of course you know, Audrey, no one can be stricter than I am ; I make a point of never forgetting a slur on any one's reputation. But when an old man marries an elegant woman young enough to be his daughter, he cannot suppose she is going to shut herself up with him, and never speak to any other.'

Audrey sat silently looking out of the window for some minutes, then she suddenly exclaimed, 'Oh, money, money, what a curse it is! I wish with all my heart I was that farm-girl outside!'

'Gracious me! what for?' asked Lady Laura, surprised at this sudden outburst.

'Because, perhaps, I should win the affection of some country bumpkin, and we should love each other with all our vulgar hearts, and, knowing no more refined motive, marry and be happy.'

'Happy! with a dozen children in a hovel, eating fat bacon, and at last dying in a workhouse! Really, for a girl brought up as you have been, that is an odd notion of happiness. My dear, these speeches are very telling, when well said in private theatricals; but in real life they are too weak and absurd.'

'So they are, but so am I, just now.'

'Then have a little wine, or sal-volatile; but pray don't lead people to suppose that you are mad.'

Audrey started up, and said abruptly, 'I think I shall take a walk in the grounds for an hour; by that time Mr Ford will have returned, and I shall be better able to make myself agreeable to him.'

'Do so,' answered Lady Laura, with a relieved look.
'Will you take Marshall with you?'

'No, I shall go alone.'

'Take care to be back in time for Mr Ford, or I shall have to go to him; and I want to write another letter to Charles: he said he should leave Harrogate to-day, but that was only to prevent me writing. I shall direct my letter to him as usual, and show him that I see through his pretext.'

Audrey was soon dressed, and walking rapidly along the paths, which, all new to her as they were a week before, were now quite familiar. She bent her steps to the 'Saint's Well,' sat down on the wooden seat, and gave a great sigh of relief. 'Now,' she said to herself, 'I can dismiss my smiles, and be as miserable as I please.'

'Gone!' in that word lay her grief. Gone!—in anger, in sorrow, in contempt of her, in hatred by this

time, thinking with loathing of her ; and she,—alas, poor Audrey ! what storms and tempests of love had swept over her ! She had tried to reason with herself, to ask why she loved him ? What demon had cursed her with this sudden passion ? All to no purpose : she had no answer to give. She had seen for some time her danger ; but being convinced that she stood upon a rock, she had braved it, even courted it, until at her last meeting with Geoffrey Dynecourt, his great love, his withering scorn, his passionate farewell had undone her. Instead of a rock, she saw too late that she had been standing upon sand, which the tide of love had suddenly swept away. How she now revolted from marrying Mr Ford ! Still, she battled with herself ; and after indulging in some wild delicious dream, in which she and Geoffrey Dynecourt lived only for one another, she would start up and declare it could not be, she must be mad. Did she not know, had she not said all her life, that when she married it should be for money ? Nothing else could give her happiness. Was not this the temptation of some fiend ? Would she not awaken from the spell, to find she had thrown away all real pleasure and secured nothing in its stead ? She *must* overcome it ; but could she only have seen him again, talked to him calmly, told him of her feelings, it would not be so hard, so bitter. She was resolved she would put retreat out of her power ; she would meet Mr Ford, and settle her fate that very afternoon, no matter how she suffered afterwards. Was it not enough to know that marriage with Geoffrey Dynecourt was impossible ? They would both be wretched. And she

half started up, and then sank back again, and sat with closed eyes and softening mouth, until a blush suffused her face, which she hid in her hands, while her lips pressed hard against them—then she rose quickly, saying, 'Oh ! why is love so cruel, and hard, and bitter ?'

She then hurried on until she came to a part of the grounds which commanded the road along which Mr Ford would return.

She had not waited many minutes before the sound of wheels told her he was near ; so she walked down to the gate, and stood leaning on it. Mr Ford was delighted to see her, and proposed that they should go back through the fields.

' Just like your thoughtfulness, my dear Miss Verschoyle, to come and meet me. When one has been worried, and busy all day, it is very refreshing to find somebody expecting you, and waiting to welcome you.'

Audrey smiled, and asked if he was tired.

' No, not tired, only glad to get back. This country life unfits one for a day's business, and I begin to think it quite a journey to London now ; there was a time when seventy or eighty miles was a mere nothing to me.'

' We will walk slowly,' she said, ' and the air will soon revive you.'

' My dear, the sight of you has revived me more than anything else could. You must not think I am past being delighted and proud to see a beautiful young lady taking the trouble to come and meet me. I know of no young fellow who wouldn't envy me.'

'Oh ! you are wrong there. The young men are not very gallant in our day.'

'Now, I am sure *you* have no reason to complain of them, whatever their general conduct may be.'

'No, they behave very well to me,' said Audrey, 'and give me quite as much attention as I wish.'

'Ah ! I wish I were only one of them.'

'Why ?' she said, looking at him smilingly.

'Because I would soon enter the lists as one of your admirers ; and, if devotion and attention could win your favour, I would certainly carry off the prize.'

'I fear,' she answered gravely, 'the prize would hardly be worth having.'

'I cannot permit you to say that, though, perhaps, you scarcely know the value it possesses in my eyes. Take my arm, my dear Miss Verschoyle, and oblige me by listening to something I have for some time desired to say to you.'

Oh ! it was coming at last—she would have to say 'Yes,' and her fate would be decided for ever. A sharp pain seemed to stab her, and she caught her breath almost in a sob.

Mr Ford stopped ; then, seeing how pale she looked, he became alarmed.

'My dear, what is the matter ?—are you ill ?—do you feel faint ? Lean on me—rest a moment.'

'It is nothing,' she answered. 'Such a sudden pain seized my side ; I am better now.'

'Yes ; but I see you are suffering still,' said the old gentleman anxiously. 'You have been doing too much.'

'Indeed, I have been very quiet all day, but I have not been well for the last week.'

'I noticed you were looking pale. We must have Dr Morcambe to see you: he will soon put you right. It would never do to allow the flower of our party to droop. I dare say it is the weather,' continued the old man; while Audrey strove with her rebellious heart, and tried to bring it to obedience. 'These changes at the end of autumn are very trying, and the past week has been as hot as July. You may be sure it has affected many people. Why, only to-day I saw our friend Mr Dyne-court; and really he was so altered, I scarcely knew him to be the same man who left us only a week ago--his face was thin and haggard, and he looked wretched, just as if he had had no sleep for a month. I was quite concerned, and begged him to see a doctor. Still he declared there was nothing wrong with him; but that is nonsense. Why should he suddenly break down in this way? Besides, he was evidently depressed; said there was no chance of his dying just yet; that he wished he could go to sleep for a year; and things of that sort. Whenever I hear that from a young person, I know there is something wrong with the mind, or the body.'

It was of no use, Audrey's will was strong, but this new feeling was stronger; and, in spite of all her efforts, forced the hot tears from her eyes.

'My poor child,' said Mr Ford, moved to pity by the look of suppressed agony in the white face before him.

His sympathy broke down the last frail barrier, and Audrey burst into a passion of tears.

Mr Ford tried to console her by saying, 'Now, never mind, my dear, this will relieve you ; you are a little hysterical.'

After a time she recovered sufficiently to apologize, saying, 'I am really quite ashamed of myself. I do not know what can be the matter with me. I felt very well when I came out. Oh ! I am much better. I can walk back now, and perhaps if I lie down quietly, I shall be all right again.'

'I hope so. I am very glad I was with you ; this might have seized you when alone.'

'I don't wish to alarm mamma, she is so very nervous,' said Audrey ; 'so I think we will go in by the turret door, and then I can reach my own room without being seen. Marshall will look after me.'

'Very well, my dear. Now do try and get a little sleep, and then after dinner you may be quite well ; and if not, you must let Dr Morcambe visit you. Dear me ! this is a sad ending to our pleasant little conversation, but it is only deferred. All in good time, I hope.'

She endeavoured to say something polite in reply, but what it was she could not tell. She only longed to be alone, to wrestle with despair, to cry out in her agony, to cherish in her heart the hope that he who had conquered her had not conquered himself, that he loved her still and could not forget her. And then she rained bitter tears over his grief, his pain, his disappointed hopes. 'Oh ! my love, my love !' she sobbed. 'What can I do ? I cannot go to you, I cannot tell you to come to me. I am powerless.' After a time she became calm, and thought, 'One thing is certain ; we must leave this place. If I

stay here I shall refuse that man ; it was all I could do to-day to restrain myself from telling him that I could never care for him. Perhaps when I go back to the old dingy house and shifting ways this madness will leave me. What will mamma say ? Whatever she says, I must tell her—beg her to save me from myself. She will think I have gone mad ; sometimes I think so too. It is so unaccountable—so sudden. Will it die out in like manner ? Oh ! I wish it would—but no, I cannot say that, for at the bottom of my cup of misery and bitterness lies a drop so sweet that it is life to taste it, and death to destroy it.'

Then, hearing some one enter the room, she said, 'Marshall, is that you ?'

'Yes, miss. Are you unwell ?'

'Yes. I shall not go down to dinner. You can bring me some tea, and tell mamma not to come up, as I have a bad headache, and wish to rest. Say I have seen Mr Ford, and he knows that I do not feel well. They are not to send for Dr Morcambe, as I am sure to be better in the morning.'

'Very well, miss.'

Marshall brought up the tea, gave it to her mistress, undid her hair, and put on her dressing-gown.

'Now you will feel more comfortable,' she said. 'I dare say it's the hot weather. I heard Mr Ford telling Mrs Winterton how ill Mr Dynecourt was looking.' And here she gave a sharp look of inquiry. 'I was so sorry when he left,' she continued, brushing softly Audrey's beautiful dark hair ; 'he is such a nice gentleman. Sometimes I used to think he was, as you said, quite handsome.'

It's a thousand pities he had to give up this place. Do you know, miss, I believe, if he'd been master of it still, you would have been asked to be mistress, quite as much as you will be now.'

'What makes you say so?'

'Because, the morning he went away, Jane—that's the upper housemaid, she's a very superior young woman—saw him come into the breakfast room, take the photograph book, and look at your likeness for a long time ; then he tore it out with such force that it split the paper : and when he turned and saw her, he gave her a half-sovereign, and shut the book, put it in the "whatnot" drawer, and went out without saying a word.'

'She had no right to speak of it,' said Audrey, huskily.

'I am quite sure that she has never breathed a word to any one but me ; and of course she didn't suppose I was going to tell you, Miss Audrey. But as I generally do tell you all that happens, I told you this.'

Her mistress was silent for a minute or two, then she said : 'The woman did not touch the book, you say ?'

'No ; and she has never touched it since.'

'Then go down, and, while they are at dinner, see if you can find it, and bring it up to me. Don't open it, Marshall.'

When Marshall returned with the book, Audrey took it from her, saying, 'I shall not want you again to-night, I think. Tell mamma, before she goes to bed, to come to me, I have something to say to her.'

CHAPTER XXII.

A RETREAT.



ADY LAURA was in excellent spirits when she entered her daughter's room. She had for the time forgotten all her troubles and vexation.

It was late ; for Mr Ford had detained her by entering confidentially into his plans for the next year. She could not quite make out whether he had proposed to Audrey or not ; but in any case it was now a settled thing, 'and my only wonder is that we've secured him,' thought she, 'for his fortune must be colossal. I am very glad now that Audrey did not have that stupid, heavy young Granton. I never *really* cared for him, though he was thought such a catch. This man could buy and sell him twice over. Dear Audrey, I am sure now she *will* be happy. I must tell her what he said about the diamonds, and a town-house. I can see we shall be allowed to manage matters just as we please, and that he is a very

sensible person, and contented to take his proper place. I shall ask Spencer to pay him a little attention. If he's in town before the marriage, he might ask him to luncheon, and take him to a committee, or something of that sort. Mr Ford would think a great deal of it; people of his class always like to talk about "what the earl said to me;" it naturally gratifies them.'

These pleasing anticipations and reflections softened Lady Laura's voice, as approaching the sofa she said, 'Are you sleeping, love?—if so, don't let me disturb you. I thought you had gone to bed, or I should have been up before. How is your head now?'

'Better.'

'I am glad of that. Mr Ford has been so anxious about you; he wanted to send for the doctor, but I told him you frequently suffered from nervous head-aches, and begged he would not do so. He thinks you are very weak and delicate. It is amusing; but when men are in love, there is no saying what they may think. Has he proposed to you?'

'No.'

'Well, then, he intends to do so at once, for he has been talking to me of his plans for next year, and inquiring about a desirable situation for a town-house, which he said must have good reception rooms; that sounded well, I thought. He also spoke of buying diamonds, which in the future would be considered family jewels, showing me in every way that money is not of the slightest consequence to him. So, my dear child, let me congratulate you on the brilliant prospect before you. You are quite sure

to become a leader in society, and you will be one of the happiest women in London. I am longing to see the envy and disappointment of all the people we know. Won't I snub those Dacres now? and I shall not be so very particular with your Aunt Glanville. I do not see that they can help us in any way, Why, how pale you are looking! I won't say another word, but send Marshall to you. I did not know you were suffering still; and I had so much to say to you.'

'Don't go,' said Audrey, sitting up and looking at her mother, 'I want to speak to you. Mamma, you know how I value everything you have been speaking of, how all my life my one idea of happiness has been to have as much money as I wanted?'

'Yes,' answered Lady Laura, with a rather surprised look at her daughter's face.

'You know how we have tried and schemed that I might make a good marriage.'

'My dear, don't say that now.'

'Well, I will leave you out; but I have always used every art I possessed to attract any man I knew to be wealthy. You know I came here with the one object that I would, if possible, marry Mr Ford.'

'Well, my dear, and you will do so. What do you mean?'

'I mean that I shall not do so!'

Lady Laura started up; but, before she could say a word, Audrey stopped her.

'Mamma, don't waste your time in reproaches, only help me—save me from myself. I want to marry Mr

Ford—I want to have his money—but I am possessed with some madness, I think. I went out this afternoon, intending that Mr Ford should ask me to be his wife, and he would have done so, but, at the very moment, to prevent me saying No to him, I had to feign illness. Mamma, we must go away from here ; all I beg of you is, not to leave me alone with him ; when I am away perhaps this feeling will go, and reason will come back. Invent something—make any pretext for taking me home, only do so. Remember, I am not a child—no wilful girl whose head is turned, and who does not know her own mind. I am a woman conscious of my danger, and of the only possible way of escape from it. Oh ! I am so wretched. I cannot think or do anything. You must help me,’ and Audrey buried her face in the cushions and sobbed bitterly.

Poor Lady Laura sat for a few moments aghast. Every hope, every plan vanished, the future seemed suddenly blotted out. Was the girl mad ? Was this the symptom of some terrible illness ? She did not know, she seemed stunned ; she waited until the sobs ceased, and then she said very quietly,—

‘Audrey, do you think you are going to be ill?’

‘No.’

‘And you know of no reason why this extraordinary feeling should have suddenly come to you, for I presume it is sudden.’

‘Yes, as I told you, only this afternoon ; after talking with you I went to meet Mr Ford, intending to settle my fate, and I—I found I could not, and if it were to happen again I know I should refuse him.’

‘Then you have not done so?’

‘No, and, mamma, let me yet have a chance ; don’t let him write or speak ; say I am very ill, say anything, only take me away from here.’

Lady Laura’s worldly wisdom did her good service now, and showed her that this was no time for reproach and recrimination. Audrey would not have asked her aid unless she had sorely needed it ; so the present was the time for action. She must tell Mr Ford that Audrey was ill, that her anxiety was aroused, that she was dreadfully nervous, and that she must see her own doctor. Their sudden flight must seem to proceed entirely from her fears for Audrey.

So she said, ‘Go to bed now, Audrey, and I will decide upon some plan by to-morrow ; at all events keep your mind easy. We will go to London as soon as it is possible. Now try and get some sleep, or I shall have you really ill upon my hands. Good-night, my dear.’

And in another moment Lady Laura’s arms were round her daughter, who laid her head against her mother’s breast as she cried, ‘Oh ! mamma, what shall I do ?’ and then, nature being stronger than art, the mother tried to soothe her child, saying that things would be well yet.

Audrey did not dare to confide all her sorrows to her mother, but the loving words and caresses did her good, and calmed her troubled heart ; and the two parted that night more affectionately than they had perhaps ever done before.

When, however, her ladyship reached her own room, and threw herself into a chair, the weary, old look in her

face told Marshall that something more than usual had happened, and she said,—

‘ You look dreadfully tired, my lady ; ain’t you well ? ’

‘ Yes, Marshall, quite well,’ answered Lady Laura, with a sigh ; ‘ but I think the world is coming to an end.’

‘ Oh ! if that’s all, I shouldn’t put myself out, my lady, for I heard Dealtry and Burgess fix the day full twenty years ago for it to come that day week, and nothing has happened yet. The world will last our time, I dare say.’

‘ I’m sure I hardly care whether it does or not, for I am weary of it sometimes, Marshall.’

Marshall did not reply, neither did she enter into further conversation ; but in her own mind she speculated on what could have happened, until, after she had bidden her ladyship good-night, a sudden thought struck her, and she inwardly exclaimed, ‘ Good gracious me ! Miss Audrey can never have refused old Ford—that’s impossible. Perhaps her ladyship has found out his money isn’t so much as she thought. It’s something to do with the money market, which with her means the marriage market. Well ! that’s one thing which reconciles me to getting my own living ; you’re independent, and where you give your hand you give your heart.’

Lady Laura certainly deserved great credit for the manner in which she effected her retreat from Dyne Court. When she made her appearance the next morning every one noticed her anxious, weary look, and gave her credit for the nervous fears she expressed for her daughter. They begged her to allow Dr Morcambe to be sent for,

as, perhaps, after all, a few days' quiet would restore Miss Verschoyle to perfect health.

'And you may depend upon it, my dear Lady Laura, that it is only this change of the season,' said Mrs Winterton; 'it is not probable that anything serious would come on so suddenly.'

'Ah! but you do not know how delicate dear Audrey is. I know she does not look so; and she has such spirit and energy, that I have known her do the most wonderful things while she has been really suffering—then all at once she would break down. This morning, I believe, she would have tried to come down, but I insisted upon her remaining quietly in her room; and I find now that she has been very unwell for more than a week.'

Here Mr Ford, who was of course very much concerned, repeated, with certain reservations, how very anxious he had been made the day before by one of Miss Verschoyle's sudden attacks of indisposition—how she had begged him not to alarm her mother; 'and it was only because she assured me that by to-day she would be perfectly recovered, that I gave up the idea of sending for Dr Morcambe. But we must have him at once; and I will send Williams off with instructions to bring him back.'

'Mr Ford is very kind,' said Lady Laura, as soon as their host had departed. 'But, you know, I could not be at rest till Dr Kenlis has seen Audrey; he has always attended her, and knows her constitution, and I have a horror of country practitioners. I do not know how to tell him—he will think me so unkind—but I must take Audrey to London. I am in such a nervous state, that I

could not remain here another day on any account. There is Mr Ford : I shall go and speak to him.'

When Mr Ford heard from Lady Laura that she thought she must return with her daughter to London, he tried every means in his power to dissuade her from doing so. He assured her of Dr Morcambe's talent, and of his own conviction that a few days' rest and nursing would restore Audrey ; and finally offered, that if things should not turn out quite as they hoped, they would send to town for Dr Kenlis.

'Thanks, dear Mr Ford, but he wouldn't come for less than a fortune ; he had a hundred guineas for going to see my niece, Lady Westfield, and their place is not so far from London as yours.'

'Well, my dear lady, if he wants *two* hundred guineas, and can do Miss Verschoyle any good, I shall be only too pleased to write my name to the cheque. I think I need hardly tell you, Lady Laura—that is, you must have seen that my very great desire is to have the pleasure some day—not a distant one, I hope—of having a right to be as careful of your dear daughter, madam, as you are yourself. And I am sure, until I am so fortunate, you will not object to my gratifying myself by expending upon her a trifle of that money which soon I hope to spend in procuring for her every comfort and luxury that she may desire.'

The tears now stood in Lady Laura's eyes. Oh ! to think that here was this man making the very offer she had so much longed for, and yet she could not secure it. What was to be done ? She would not give up hope,

however ; it might be managed yet ; so, after applying her handkerchief to her eyes, she answered,—

‘ I dare say you will think what I am going to say very odd, dear Mr Ford, and perhaps very few mothers would be so candid ; but I cannot tell you how greatly I have desired to see dear Audrey’s happiness intrusted to your keeping. Audrey, you know, is very peculiar in many ways, and different from girls in general. She could never endure men of her own age, and has often said, when I have remarked upon this peculiarity, “ No, mamma, the man whom I marry I must esteem and respect ; these qualities are of more value to me than love, and will always secure true affection.” I am sure, Mr Ford, you will win her heart, but you must promise me one thing.’

‘ What is that, my dear lady ? ’

‘ Not to breathe one word of this for the present. If you do, I shall be wretched ; for Dr Kenlis has always said, that the slightest excitement when Audrey’s nerves are in this state might produce the most fatal consequences. You know her dear father suffered from heart disease. Now, my dear Mr Ford, I may rely upon your not speaking to her at present ? Believe me, it is only deferring it, though I have no right, perhaps, to say so ; but dear Audrey and I are more like sisters than mother and daughter ; our hearts are open to each other. Now, I have your promise ? ’

‘ If you insist upon it, certainly yes ; but I hardly see the necessity myself, and she may be quite well in a few days.’

‘ True, but after what has occurred, I cannot but think

it would be better for us to return home at once. One never knows how these things get abroad ; yet, when people are together, they do ; and I could not bear that a remark should be made upon our remaining. All things considered, I think it will be best for us to go to town at once. Audrey's health will be sufficient plea. You will be coming up in a few weeks, and then I trust she will be quite strong. Many of our relations will be in London ; and the engagement can be announced formally. In the mean time, I shall look upon it as a settled thing, and on you, my dear Mr Ford, as one of the family. It is very strange, but in talking of intrusting my dear child to you, it does not seem to be like parting with her ; hitherto, although I should never have tried to influence her where her affections were concerned, I have shuddered at the thought of her marrying. Is it to be wondered at ? My children are all I have left to me in the world, and the securing of their happiness has been the sole aim of my life. Now I shall consider dear Audrey only my trust, to be guarded until I can give her to the man who will be the choice of her mother, as well as of herself. That is the General coming. I feel unequal to conversing with any indifferent person ; so, for the present adieu. I shall go and prepare Audrey gently for returning to London. I know it will be a dreadful trial for her to leave Dyne Court, and I shall be sorely tempted to comfort her by saying it is only for a time. Soon she will be here never to leave, unless by her own wish ; but that we *must* leave now, I feel to be only right, and acting for the best.'

Mr Ford watched her depart, hat in hand ; then, without waiting for General Trefusis, he turned into a side walk, saying, 'I wonder if this *is* her motive for leaving. There seems to me a little air of mystery about the proceedings of the last day or two ; perhaps it is only my fancy, these fashionable ladies have such wonderful ways with them. What a humbug that woman is ! Fortunately the daughter does not resemble her mother, or she would never be asked to be my wife. You're sharp, too, my lady, and you've got your wits about you ; you wouldn't make a bad wife for a huckster, in spite of your blue blood and your long pedigree.'

CHAPTER XXIII.

OFF AND ON.



HEN Josiah Crewdson got home he received such a frigid greeting from his sisters, that he was afraid to say anything about his visit to London. But when the sharp edge of their displeasure had worn off, he said that Dorothy Fox was coming to York to stay with her Aunt Abigail ; that she had also accepted the invitation which he had given her at their request when in Devonshire, and it only remained for them to write, naming the time which would be most convenient for her visit.

The Miss Crewdsons had been grimly satisfied that day by hearing that the unruly son of a somewhat lax cousin had disregarded his parents' wishes, and utterly frustrated their hopes. Kezia and Jemima had always said that Samuel Snow would turn out badly, and had remonstrated with his mother on the excessive fondness which had made her foolishly blind to her son's failings.

Others had said the boy would come right, but Jemima and Kezia knew better ; and now it had turned out just as they had predicted. They were not glad at the boy's downfall, but it was pleasant to be so much more shrewd and far-seeing than their neighbours.

At dinner they were more gracious to Josiah, and this change in their manner at once determined him to seize the opportunity, and broach the subject nearest his heart. So, after a little attempt at finesse, he said, ' Grace Hanbury told me she remembered you both.'

' And why should she not ? ' demanded Jemima. ' She was one of the most forward girls I ever saw. I sincerely hope Dorothy does not take after her.'

' No,' replied Josiah, vainly endeavouring to keep down the colour which would fly to his face whenever that name was mentioned. ' They are not at all like each other. Dorothy is like her mother. She said she had her father's permission to spend a little time with us on her way to or from York : would it not be best to have her before she goes to Abigail Fletcher's ? '

The sisters exchanged glances ; and then Kezia said, ' Did she propose coming herself, or didst thou ask her again ? '

' I invited her in Devonshire, and when I saw her again in London I asked her if she were coming. I thought thou and Jemima would wish me to do so.'

' Thy sisters would wish thee to fear lying lips, Josiah,' said Jemima, sternly, ' and to speak the truth as thou hast been brought up to do. As we once asked Dorothy Fox here, we still expect her to come ; but it would have

better become thee to have consulted us before thou didst renew our invitation.'

'I cannot see why you should both be so changed towards her,' exclaimed Josiah, now bristling up in defence of Dorothy. 'Before I went to Devonshire you were always speaking in praise of the Foxes.'

'And now we have nothing to say against them or her; but it is only fair to tell thee that Kezia and I have observed a change in thee, not for the better; and we fear that Dorothy is in some way to blame for it. In our Society it is not considered modest or becoming for young men and women to be talking of loving each other; a higher principle than mere human affection should be the motive for a consistent marriage.'

Josiah was silent. It was impossible for him to argue with his sisters, or to defend his love, about which he often had sore pricks of conscience, not knowing if he were right in cherishing the passion which was daily growing stronger within him.

Jemima's face relaxed; she saw she had touched the boy, as she always called him. So she seated herself more firmly on her chair in order to carry on the good work and improve the opportunity. For the next hour Josiah listened patiently, and with apparent attention, to a jobation, in the form of a duet; for when Jemima stopped, Kezia took up the discourse. Each sister performed her part with such satisfaction to herself that, when they had finished, Jemima extended her hard bony hand to Josiah, telling him to be thankful that he had those about him who would never see him go astray with-

out speaking words of reproof, prompted only by anxiety for his welfare. Kezia afterwards wrote to Dorothy that they would be glad to see her, if convenient, on her way to York.

When the letter reached Dorothy, it suddenly recalled her to a sense of what was expected of her: that she should not unasked give her love to any man; and that if she were asked, she should firmly deny it to one opposed in every way to those principles which she held dear.

Of late, Charles Verschoyle had come frequently to Fryston, and though, when Grace and John were present, he only paid Dorothy the attention demanded by courtesy, when they were alone, by many an expressive look and word he showed her who it was that drew him constantly there, and why he was never contented to be absent. Perhaps, had Dorothy been more honest with herself, she might have effectually battled with the temptation. But the idea of her caring for a man who was not a Friend, and worse still, who was a soldier, was so repugnant to her that she would not face the difficulty. She was confident in her strength, and certain that nothing could make her disobey her father, or forget her principles. And, though her heart was heavy at the thought of leaving Fryston, she persuaded herself it was so because of her fondness for Grace and the children.

So without allowing herself time for reflection she wrote accepting Kezia Crewdson's invitation, and replied to a letter from Josiah, telling him she was sorry not to have seen him again, but that when she came to Headingley she hoped they would be a great deal together.

Then she ran down-stairs, and asked Mr Hanbury to post the letters, returning to her room to weep the most bitter tears she had ever shed in her life.

Captain Verschoyle could not understand what was wrong with Dorothy. That evening he dined at the Grange, and had a *tête-à-tête* with her while Grace went for John, but though he repeated all the sweet sayings which usually made her lovely eyes look shyly into his, Dorothy continued in her most staid manner, until he was tempted to say more than was prudent in his eagerness to get one of the glances which now seemed to him the most desirable thing in the whole world. Of course he could not marry Dorothy,—that was out of the question. In the first place, she was a Quaker, and Quakers always marry Quakers; here he winced a little, as if his first argument was not particularly pleasant to him; secondly, he could not afford to marry without money; and, thirdly, her father kept a shop. The whole affair was absurd: nobody would expect him to do such a thing. His mind then reverted to her prim manner, and he wondered what could be the matter with the child, she had been so different of late. Perhaps some one had been speaking to her about him. ‘More than likely,’ he said: ‘what an extraordinary thing it is that some people can’t let others alone; they must suggest, or warn, or interfere! I call it unwarrantable impertinence;’ and Captain Verschoyle continued to abuse these imaginary persons, until he resolved to frustrate their designs by going down the next day to Fryston, and driving it all out of the pretty creature’s head.

And when he went, the pretty creature had suffered so much from the fear that she had offended him, and that he would not come again, that she threw prudence to the wind, looked more bewitchingly at him than ever, and resolutely salved her conscience by saying to herself, that while she was here it was of no use, but when she went to Headingley she would *really* try to like Josiah Crewdson.

All in vain, therefore, did Mrs Hanbury ask eligible Friends to luncheon or dinner. Dorothy made herself very agreeable during their stay, but was quite indifferent whether they ever came again or not.

At last, in her disappointment, Grace confided to John that she believed in her heart that Dolly really cared for that gawky-looking Josiah Crewdson.

‘Oh! I dare say,’ replied her husband stolidly.

‘Thou dare say!’ repeated Grace; ‘why, John, thou hast never seen him; thou dost not know what he is like.’

‘Thou hast given me a very full description of his peculiarities,’ laughed John, ‘ending with the invariably expressed opinion of his worth and goodness which usually finishes the portraiture of a plain and awkward person.’

‘I really do not think that I have dealt hardly with him,’ said Grace, with a rather rueful face, ‘and I believe in his kind disposition; but it does seem a sacrifice to marry Dolly to him, and bury her in that dull house at Headingley.’

‘Well, my dear, but if it be her pleasure, why annoy thyself? She is not compelled to marry Crewdson.’

‘But father wishes it so much : he has set his heart upon the match.’

‘Ah ! a great many fathers and mothers set their hearts on matches that never come off, my dear.’

‘Yes, but Dorothy is different from most girls, John ; she would never marry any one of whom father did not approve.’

‘Hum !’ said John, screwing his mouth in a comical way. ‘If Fate had decreed that I should be the man upon whom your sister had set her affection, I should not fear the disapprobation of fifty fathers. Where that young lady bestows her love, she will not keep much back for anybody else ; and she’s too much her father’s daughter to give up easily what she has set her heart upon.’

‘Josiah Crewdson is wealthy, I suppose ?’ said Grace.

‘Yes, he is said to be a rich man. His father left him a considerable amount of property, besides the business, which I hear is rapidly increasing. Josiah Crewdson is considered a very shrewd, safe fellow.’

‘However, that need not influence Dorothy,’ answered Grace, ‘for she is sure to have a good fortune. Besides her mother’s money, all Aunt Abigail’s is certain to come to her.’

‘Rich, young, and beautiful ! What more can man desire ?’

‘Why, that she should desire him ; and I have seen no sign of that yet.’

‘Well,’ said John, laughing, ‘do you know that it has struck me that there has been a considerable amount of

philandering lately, under our very sharp noses, without our taking much account of it.'

'What dost thou mean?' asked Grace, in a tone of surprise.

'I mean, my dear, that, notwithstanding my firm belief that we are two of the most interesting and attractive people to be met with in the United Kingdom, yet when Dorothy leaves us, we shall not be quite so frequently favoured with visits from our friend Captain Verschoyle.'

'Nonsense. What is there to make thee imagine such a thing?'

'Well, for one thing—whenever we are out walking they always manage to fall behind.'

'That is only because we are talking together, and they wish to keep at a little distance from us.'

'Yes; but there is a limit to most people's distance. But, unless it's out of sight and hearing, I have not discovered the limit to theirs. Then, when we are in the house, they are in the garden; and if we are in the garden, the objects of interest to them in the opposite direction are really surprising. Why, Grace, it is not so long since our own love-making days that thou shouldst forget all its cunning devices.'

'I have not forgotten one of them,' she said, looking at him tenderly; 'but I cannot believe that what thou art thinking of is true. However, I shall now take care to watch them narrowly.'

'Quite right,' said her husband, preparing to leave; 'for I have a suspicion that Grace, as well as Love, is sometimes blind.'

CHAPTER XXIV.

‘ALL THAT IS RIGHT.’



T was the last week of October, and the last week of Dorothy's visit to Fryston. On the following Thursday she was to leave for Headingley. Captain Verschoyle still remained in London. At first he said business detained him, but the business was no more than the ordering of a shooting suit. Then he overstayed Colonel Stapleton's invitation ; and after disappointing Stapleton he couldn't go anywhere else ; so he decided to stay now until Harry Egerton returned to Darington.

Mr Egerton had been at Darington a week ; still his godson lingered in town, until a letter from Audrey announced Lady Laura's intention of returning home, to which was added, as a bit of sisterly advice, that unless he was equal to squalls he had better disappear at once.

‘That decides me,’ thought Captain Verschoyle after reading the letter. ‘I must not encounter her ladyship

at present; so to-day I shall tell the Hanburys I have been called away suddenly. I wonder how Dorothy will take it. Of course we both knew the time must come for saying, "Adieu, my love, for evermore adieu;" but it's none the more pleasant for that. If I saw much more of her I verily believe I should make an ass of myself—as it is, we are neither of us at all compromised. I believe the child loves me, and I never felt it so hard to give up any girl before. Ah! I was always an unfortunate beggar. I never met a girl yet that I liked but she was sure either not to have a penny, or to belong to a family beyond the pale of the magic circle.'

Here Captain Verschoyle looked at his watch, and resolved to catch the early train, Mrs Hanbury having announced to him her intention of not returning from London until five o'clock.

Of course he could not see the sweet picture that Dorothy made as she stood half-way up the hedge-bank, holding back the nut branches in a strained, eager, listening attitude, trying to make sure that she heard the coming train in the distance, while with every rapid beat her heart seemed to cry aloud, 'Will he come? Will he come?'

Captain Verschoyle got out of the train and walked to the house. He hoped that he would find Dorothy alone, for then he knew he should see the soft colour leap into her cheeks, and die away so slowly; he knew that he should feel her little hand tremble in his like a frightened bird; and he knew that the shy eyes would meet his, and be dropped again before he had taken in half of their beauty, making him determine to have them lifted again and again.

And yet he could say they both 'meant nothing,' and that they were not in the least committed to one another.

Dorothy remained in her elevated position until she saw the smoke of the train puffing on and away. Then she scrambled down and tried to stay patiently, beguiling the tedious waiting by many a youthful device. At length she felt so certain that more than the given time had elapsed that she determined to run in and look at the hall clock. Turning quickly out from the nut-walk, she found herself face to face with Captain Verschoyle, who took both her hands in his, and bending towards her, said: 'Were you running to meet me? I shall keep you prisoner until you tell me.'

'Yes—no—that is, I was going to see if thou hadst come.'

'Then you expected me?'

'No, I did not quite.'

'Not expect me, and yet tell me you were going to see if I had come!' he said in a disappointed tone.

'I did not expect thee, but I hoped that thou wouldest come.'

Oh! the coy sweet eyes that met his, how lovely they were! He could have taken her in his arms that very moment.

They walked back through the nut-walk, he expressing much surprise at hearing that Mrs Hanbury was in London.

'Grace thought she had told thee,' exclaimed Dorothy; 'she said it was just possible thou mightst come down by this train, and if so, I—'

'Well?'

‘Was to amuse thee until she came.’

‘What a shameful task to impose upon your young shoulders!’ said Captain Verschoyle. ‘You will require to exert yourself to your utmost.’

‘Indeed, no,’ she replied, laughing, ‘for it is thou who wilt amuse me. I like to listen when thou art talking.’

‘Dorothy—I may call you Dorothy, may I not?’

‘Oh yes!’ and her quick colour told how sweet the name sounded.

‘Of course,’ he continued, ‘all your friends call you Dorothy. Then, Dorothy, when we are parted will you think of me sometimes?’

‘Parted!’ Ah, she remembered, in a week she would be away from Fryston; she was looking very grave now. ‘Think of thee?’ she repeated.

‘Why,’ he said with affected impatience, ‘is it impossible for you to do so? Will you forget me at once for some other who will amuse you? Oh, Dorothy!’

‘Thou knowest well I do not mean that,’ she said, looking straight at him. ‘I could not forget thee,’ she added, while her voice came with a tremor which she endeavoured to suppress by saying, ‘but I am not going for a week yet.’

‘But I am.’

‘Thou!’

‘Yes, I must go to see my godfather.’

His heart reproached him when he saw how pale she became;—poor darling, she, too, would feel the parting. In spite of his pity, however, an exultant feeling of joy came over him. But his voice was most desponding as

he said, 'You will have gone before I return from York.'

York ! that was where Aunt Abigail lived ; suppose it should be near, and they were to meet again.

'My Aunt Abigail lives near York,' she said ; 'I am going to see her before I return home.'

Captain Verschoyle's heart gave a leap, and his blood tingled in his veins, as he exclaimed—

'My dear child, is it possible that you are going to York ? How delightful ! we shall be there together, perhaps.'

'I—I was thinking of asking to be allowed to go home instead ; I have been away from my mother so long that I do not care about visiting any more.'

'But not now ;—you will go to York now ?' he said eagerly ; then bending close to her, he repeated, 'You will go now ; I am sure you would say yes if you could understand how happy it would make me.'

Dorothy did not answer ; her colour changed, her eyelids quivered, and her mouth tightened one moment to relax the next, and gradually open like a fresh rosebud.

Several times during their interview Charles Verschoyle's conscience had asserted itself, giving him sharp pricks, and asking if he were acting up even to his own code of honour ; but he would not listen now. What cared he at that moment for anything but the certainty that the girl loved him with all the warmth of her heart ? He had laid his love at the feet of fair ones before ; had vowed and sighed, and had been met on equal ground. He had been courted, flattered, caressed, but never loved by a girl who artlessly betrayed what she strove to conceal.

When she looked at him she did so because she was drawn to him irresistibly ; when she blushed, it was the shy blush of girlish innocence, with no thought of the effect produced. Such a woman was a novelty to a man like Charles Verschoyle. He enjoyed Dorothy's tell-tale face and the sweet secret it betrayed, without a thought of anything beyond the present moment. Time enough for reflection when they were apart from each other.

‘Dorothy,’ he almost whispered, ‘will you not say that you will go now?’

No answer.

‘Ah! it is nothing to you that we are parted,’ he said, turning from her with a discontented sigh. ‘You want to be back in Devonshire with your mother ; and you do not care if I suffer.’

There was a pause, and then he felt a little hand laid upon his arm, and Dorothy's sweet eyes looked beseechingly into his, as she said timidly, ‘Say, would it really make thee more happy if I went?’

Who could resist it? The temptation was too strong for Charles Verschoyle, so he framed the sweet face in his hands, and said, ‘Dorothy, do you love me?’

‘Yes,’ said the glad eyes ; ‘yes,’ said the soft mouth ; and ‘yes’ seemed to be echoed by the throbbing of her heart.

‘With all your heart?’

‘Yes,’ and the eyes looked straight into his.

‘Better than all the world?’

‘Yes.’

And the autumn winds sighed softly, and rustled

among the leaves overhead, but Dorothy heeded not; and the roses shed their leaves despairingly at her feet, but she saw them not. For love held back the sands of Time, and flooded all around with his golden light.

‘My darling! I hear some one coming.’

‘Coming—here?’ she said in a terrified voice; ‘what shall I do?’

‘Turn down the path and go into the house by the other way, and I will meet them and say all that is right.’

She did not wait for another word; and Captain Verschoyle sauntered along the nut-walk, until the footsteps came near, and Mrs Hanbury exclaimed—

‘What, by yourself? Where is that naughty sister of mine? I expected to find her politely entertaining you.’

‘So she has been; but her anxiety to ascertain if you had arrived overcame her politeness, and she ran into the house a few minutes since.’

‘And, now, how are you?’ said Grace. ‘I am so glad you decided to come; for John is bringing a friend to dinner. I have never seen him; but he says we shall all like him. You came down by the three-o’clock train, I suppose?’

‘Yes. I looked for you at the station, but did not see you. Had I been quite sure you were coming by this train, of course I would have waited for you.’

There was a pause; and Grace thought something was wrong with her friend; for do what he would, Captain Verschoyle was not at ease, and could not provide small talk as usual.

Grace observed this restraint, as well as the nervous

way in which he twisted one end of his moustache. So she told him where she had been, what purchases she had made, and smiled internally to think of poor Dolly's state of mind when sustaining the conversation by herself. She did not wonder now at her running in to see if the train had brought her to the rescue.

When they got in-doors, Dorothy was not to be seen. Mrs Hanbury announced her intention of going at once to look for her; but Captain Verschoyle asked her a question, which, he said, had been puzzling him, about one of Leslie's pictures.

This entailed another half-hour's conversation, and then the children came in; and it was dusk before Dorothy made her appearance, stammering out something about thinking they were in the garden.

‘Bless the child,’ laughed Grace. ‘We have not taken leave of our senses yet. We came in-doors nearly an hour ago. I only went out to look for you, and we returned at once. Now it is time we did a little adornment; for John is bringing a friend with him.’ Turning to Captain Verschoyle, she added, ‘He is a gentleman with whom John is very much pleased, for the manner in which he conducted a troublesome lawsuit in which the firm was lately engaged. He has a somewhat romantic history too.’

‘Indeed!’ replied Captain Verschoyle, in such a tone that Mrs Hanbury knew that she might as well reserve her story, for to-night it would fall on very dull ears. So she arose, saying—

‘But while I am talking, I am forgetting how the time

is going. Come, Dolly, we must go and dress ;' and the sisters left the room.

Captain Verschoyle stretched himself, and gazed into the fire for fully twenty minutes. Whether his thoughts were happy or not, his face did not indicate ; only at the end of that time he started up, and said—

‘Well, I cannot help it now ; and if it were all to come over again, I would act in exactly the same way. But what’s to be the end of it, or what I mean, I really cannot tell.’

He then rang the bell, and desired Cannon to show him his room, determining not to worry himself more that night with such reflections.

Notwithstanding, it was not the amount of care he bestowed upon his personal appearance that detained him at his toilette so long that when he appeared in the drawing-room all were assembled.

John Hanbury was showing his wife a new photograph. By Dorothy’s side sat Geoffrey Dynecourt. The blood rushed into his face as Captain Verschoyle exclaimed,—

‘Why, Dynecourt, when did you come back ? I thought you were out in the country.’

‘I might echo your words, for you were expected the same day that I left Mr Ford’s.’

‘Ah, but, you see, I never turned up,’ and Captain Verschoyle laughed, for Lady Laura had been very careful not to inform her son of his rival’s flitting.

‘Ah ! you are friends already,’ said Grace ; ‘that is delightful.’

‘Yes, we were staying together in a country-house the

other day, and a very jolly time we had. You stayed a week beyond me, Dynecourt. What did you all do? Poor old Ford got ill, did he not?'

'Yes, but he soon recovered.'

It cost Mr Dynecourt an effort to appear at ease, and to speak in his usual tone of voice. He longed to ask Captain Verschoyle if his mother and sister were in London, but to mention Audrey in an indifferent voice, and with a careless manner, was simply impossible.

'By the way, did that second picnic come off?'

'The second picnic! Oh yes.'

'I wonder,' thought Captain Verschoyle, 'if he was sweet upon Miss Bingham; it looks like it; he seems to shirk talking about the party.'

Just then dinner was announced, and the conversation passed to other subjects, until Captain Verschoyle said, 'My mother is coming to London in a day or two with my sister, who has been ill and laid up at Dyne Court for more than a week.'

There was an awkward pause, and then Mr Dynecourt replied, 'Indeed! has she?'

Grace, with a woman's tact, saw that all was not plain sailing, so she contrived to direct the conversation into another channel.

Captain Verschoyle was too much occupied with his own affairs to be much impressed by any one's manner; he only wondered for a moment if his mother had been talking too much about Miss Bingham and him, and so had offended Dynecourt.

Grace, in her own mind, came nearer the mark. Doro

thy, who had hardly spoken during dinner, asked Mr Dynecourt, when Grace and Captain Verschoyle were at the piano, if he did not think Audrey Verschoyle very lovely.

'Do you know her?' he asked.

'I met her once in Devonshire; and I shall never forget her.'

Mr Dynecourt recalled the evening that he and Audrey had spent in Mr Ford's room, and the description which she had given of the lovely young Quaker and her mother. Surely this was the girl Audrey had longed to be like. Oh, if she had been like her, how different his life might have been! He knew now that, in spite of the bitterness of his words at parting, and the determination he formed then to forget her and to learn to hate her, it was impossible. She would occupy a deeper place in his heart than any woman he should ever meet again. Often, when he sat in his chambers, weary and worn by his hard work, he recalled the injustice she had done him; and then, after enumerating her faults, her worldliness, her coldness of heart—dwelling on every soft seduction as a trick—he would almost grind his teeth, as he exclaimed—'And, knowing all this, I can love her still! Fool that I am!'

A thousand wild thoughts filled his mind when he heard that Audrey had been ill—he was glad, sorry. Could she have been thinking about him? Had she refused Mr Ford? This simple girl evidently knew nothing of her; would, perhaps, never see her again; he might indulge in speaking of Audrey, and hear her spoken of, where there was no chance of his secret being discovered.

So Dorothy tried to arouse herself from her own dream, to talk to her grave-looking companion. She did not tell him what had brought Audrey and Charles Verschoyle to King's-heart. She only described their visit, and praised Audrey so much, that Mr Dynecourt was delighted with her. He sat listening so earnestly that Captain Verschoyle was quite annoyed. Further on in the evening, when Dorothy went to fetch something for her sister, and Geoffrey turned to Mrs Hanbury, saying, 'How lovely your sister is ! I have not been so charmed with any one for a long time,' Captain Verschoyle thought—'What can the fellow mean ?

CHAPTER XXV.

IN DOUBT AND GRIEF AND HOPE.

HOUGH Grace Hanbury told her husband that she still believed his suspicions concerning Dorothy and Captain Verschoyle to be entirely unfounded, she considered it prudent to err on the safe side: by which she meant, that the two should now have as few opportunities of meeting each other as possible.

‘Dorothy will leave us in a few days,’ she said, ‘and Captain Verschoyle told me he was soon going out of town to visit his godfather. So, John, dost thou not think it is as well to try and keep them apart?’

‘Certainly,’ answered her husband, laughing; ‘although I am forcibly reminded of the Chester saying, “When the daughter’s stolen, lock the Pepper gate.”’

‘Nonsense,’ said Grace, a little vexed. ‘If Dorothy *is* struck by him, I am quite sure it is no serious wound; and as for him, I believe it is his nature to pay attention

to any woman he happens to be near. You may depend upon it he has no intention but that of making himself agreeable'

'He is very well connected,' said Mr Hanbury; 'it comes out every now and then. His uncle is Lord Tonmouth, and his mother is a lady of title.'

'Just so; and that makes the notion of any engagement between them absurd. I hope I have not been careless. I don't really think I have—only I have taken fright now.'

'Don't do that, dear,' said John kindly. 'There may be nothing in it; but next time he writes, say thou hast an engagement, and fix a day when Dolly will have left us.'

In accordance with this decision, when the next day a letter came from Captain Verschoyle saying that he hoped to see them on Tuesday, Mrs Hanbury wrote to inform him that they were all going to spend that day with John's mother at Hampstead. But she asked him to come on the following Saturday instead.

Captain Verschoyle in his heart felt relieved at not having just then to face Mrs Hanbury; he wrote in reply that he was compelled to leave London immediately, and hoped to see them on his return. He requested her to convey to her sister his adieux, and expressed his regret at being unable to make them in person. He thought this was really cleverly managed. Dorothy would, of course, understand the plan, though she would not perhaps see the motive which prompted it. Here, however, he was mistaken.

Mrs Hanbury had more tact than most women, but she

would never have made a diplomatist. At the very time when there was need for concealment, stratagem, or finesse, Grace turned out a decided bungler, showing by her awkward manner how foreign chicanery was to her frank and open nature. Captain Verschoyle's first letter having been kept secret from Dorothy, the arrival of the second, with its message, rather put her out. She felt Dorothy would suspect something because of the awkward manner in which she blurted out the intelligence without looking at her. Dorothy murmured something in reply which Grace did not catch. When she did cast a furtive look at her young sister, she saw that her face was white and her lips tightly pressed together.

'Poor child!' thought Grace, 'I fear there is something in John's suspicions. I should have been more watchful, but I had better take no notice now.' Therefore, though her kind heart prompted her to say some sympathetic words, she refrained, and allowed Dorothy to leave the room.

It must not be presumed that since the evening when Dorothy and Charles Verschoyle parted in the garden, she had thought nothing more of their interview. But no one who knew Dorothy would have believed her possessed of such strength of mind as made her appear to others the same happy and contented girl she had formerly been. Of the tears which regret and unconquerable love drew from her eyes, no trace was visible in the morning, though half the night was spent in imaginary interviews with her lover, in which he pleaded vainly that she would renounce her principles and become a soldier's wife.

Dorothy firmly resolved never to marry any man but Charles Verschoyle ; yet marry him she could not. What ! forget her father, her mother, and all the lessons they had taught her ! And for a stranger, too ! Impossible ! Yet Dorothy's happiest dream was that Charles Verschoyle might forsake his profession, and become of like mind with Friends in every other way. She never doubted that she should see him again. But she resolved that this interview should be their last, and that she would tell him they must part. It was only when the news of his departure came, that she knew how much hope had hitherto sustained her. Now, as she sat gazing vacantly, she could only repeat to herself the word 'Gone !'—gone without seeing her, without a word ! What could it mean ? Then the hot blood rushed to her face, as the terrible thought flashed upon her that she had acted in an unmaidenly manner in so openly betraying her love, and thus had lost his respect for ever. 'Oh, but to see him again, only once again !' rose from her heart.

Dorothy knew well that she had no right to go to the Crewdsons ; that her duty was to return home, and at the very least tell her father that she could not marry Josiah. But her feelings led one way and her duty the other, and she argued that it would be better that Josiah should get her adverse decision from her own lips. Then, her aunt expected her, and it would be selfish to disappoint dear Aunt Abigail. While all this passed through Dorothy's mind, she endeavoured to give no heed to the whispered hope,—'Perhaps at York I shall see him

again ;'—a hope prompted by a newly-awakened feeling more potent than early prejudices or principles. Hence her fits of penitence—of horror that she was deceiving her parents, and of shame that she was disregarding the rules of the Society—had their sway for the moment, and then died away. This hope, however, lived on, smouldering sometimes, fiercely burning at others, but ever there to comfort and sustain its sweet companion, Love. Therefore Dorothy did not speak of returning home ; and it was finally arranged that under the care of one of Grace's servants, who was going to York for her holiday, she would leave Friston on the Thursday following for Leeds.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MISS BROCKLEHURST SPEAKS HER MIND.



LADY LAURA VERSCHOYLE and her daughter had again taken possession of 27A, Egmont Street. Their departure from Dyne Court had been delayed by Audrey's real illness. Her anxiety had induced a feverish, nervous attack which rendered her removal impossible ; and for ten days she had been in reality an invalid. Since then they had been living at Hastings, in the hope that the sea air would recruit her health.

Miss Brocklehurst, who was Lady Laura's cousin, had a house there, and during their stay they were her guests.

Lady Laura, for the first time in her life, felt great anxiety about Audrey's health. She made up her mind to consult a physician whenever they returned to London. She was quite certain that there was something seriously wrong with Audrey, else why this unusual and extraordinary conduct ? To Miss Brocklehurst alone did she con-

fide her fears, hoping that her cousin might suggest some solution of a mystery which puzzled her greatly.

'And now, my dear Maria,' said her ladyship, as she concluded her statement, 'can you suggest any motive or reason for such unaccountable behaviour?'

'Not if you are telling me the whole truth,' answered Miss Brocklehurst. 'But are you sure that you are not keeping in the background some good-looking penniless young man to whom Audrey has lost her heart—of which I should say she had very little, by-the-by—as well as her head, which is her strong point, for I do not think your daughter a beauty, Laura, and I have always told you so.'

'Disgusting old maid!' thought Lady Laura to herself; 'when Audrey is married to Mr Ford I really think I'll tell her my mind.' But she answered blandly, 'So you have, dear cousin; but still, she gets an immense deal of attention.'

'Ah, so did I when I was young.'

'Your fifty thousand pounds may have,' her ladyship thought to herself as she continued aloud—'I am sure you did. But you were asking about young men. Well, there was not one there, save Charles and a Mr Dynecourt, who was dying for Miss Bingham, the girl to whom Charles behaved so shamefully.'

'Shamefully!' echoed Miss Brocklehurst contemptuously; 'with you, Laura, that depends on the amount of money the girl has. You defended him warmly enough in that affair with Constance Stanmore.'

'Now, my dear Maria, I assure you, you were quite

mistaken in that girl ; she was as artful as could be, and laid a trap for poor Charles.'

'Poor Charles, indeed !' laughed Miss Brocklehurst ; 'he's a fit subject for pity, certainly. Nonsense, Laura, I have no patience with you. Charles is a favourite of mine. Like his poor father, he has a deal of good in him if it only got a chance of coming out ; but I am not blind to his being as selfish as he can be, and if somebody or something does not alter him he'll be a self-indulgent middle-aged man, if not a thoroughly wicked and disagreeable old one.'

'I am sure,' began Lady Laura in an aggrieved voice, 'I don't know why you should say such things of my poor children. I am sure Audrey and Charles are devoted to you, Maria.'

'No, they are not,' replied Miss Brocklehurst, with an amused smile on her face ; 'and better still, they don't pretend to be. Whenever I get a bit of toadying from them it comes with a bad grace that all your drilling cannot hide. I am not speaking against them, for in my way I am fond of them both ; but you and I are relations, you know, and relations can afford to say what they think, and speak the truth to each other. *You always do, I know*, so you must allow me the same privilege. I can tell you that I consider your children's bringing up would have spoiled the finest nature ever bestowed on a human being. Now don't begin about the sacrifices you have made, because every time you have wanted to borrow a hundred pounds I have heard all about them. I am not blaming *you*, Laura ; for though they are your children

they are no more like you than I am, and I dare say you understand them just as little.'

By this time Lady Laura had made very free use of that valuable accessory, her handkerchief. Whether her tears ever did really flow no one knew, but from the display she made of her handkerchief, the effect generally produced was good.

'Of course,' she answered in a subdued tone, 'I can say nothing; but it is rather hard to have done all a mother could do for Audrey, and then, because she takes some idle whim, to have it said to me that I have been negligent, and have allowed her to compromise herself with some penniless—adventurer.'

Miss Brocklehurst could not forbear laughing at Lady Laura allowing the hard knocks to go by, and settling upon an imaginary grievance. 'Oh, make your mind easy on that score,' she said; 'I do not suppose poor Audrey's character will ever come forth with such strength that she will refuse a rich, vulgar old man, because some fascinating fellow of her own age and condition has taken her heart captive. If she did so I should be proud of my god-daughter, as I am of Charley, if want of love was his true motive in this Bingham affair.'

Even Lady Laura's patience had its limits. This was too much for her. And she rose, saying angrily—

'I really believe, Maria, if my children married beggars, or the very trades-people's belongings, you would be delighted, and triumph over me.'

'No, I should not, Laura. I should be sorry; although, perhaps, it would be better for them than many matches

which the world calls splendid and eligible. Don't be angry ; remember I have had fifty years' rivalry with money. To it most of the lovers I ever had paid their court ; and so I glory over every defeat of Mammon, and rejoice when mine ancient enemy gets the worst of it. There, there ; sit down, and don't look so mournful. If, as you say, there is nobody else to influence her choice, of course it must be an idle whim, which will soon pass over ; so that, before the end of the season, Croesus will doubtless be your son-in-law.'

Could Audrey have heard this conversation, it might have given her a grain of that comfort she just now stood so sorely in need of. She longed for some one to talk to about this care which was destroying her peace of mind. She thought of the women she had known—women who had undoubtedly married for money or position. Had they gone through such struggles and temptations ? Had they fought, and conquered, and come forth victorious, wreathed with triumphant smiles ? Night and day the conflict seemed to go on within her, and from it there was no rest nor respite ; she could make no decision, and arrive at no conclusion. She had great dread of meeting Mr Ford before her mind was fully made up. At Hastings she was safe ; but once back in Egmont Street, he might present himself to her at any moment.

Miss Brocklehurst looked at her earnestly, as they stood waiting for the train ; and, while Lady Laura was asking Marshall some questions, she said, 'Audrey, if you want another change at any time, remember you can always

come to me. Nonsense, my dear, it is only right ; you are my godchild, you know.'

After they had gone, Miss Brocklehurst, meditating on the care-worn look on Audrey's face, said to herself. 'There's something on that girl's mind, I am certain. There's more in this sudden change than meets the eye. I wonder what it can be ? Her mother said she had not seen any one ; but then Laura's a fool, and never speaks the truth. On my way home I'll propose to stay in Egmont Street for a few days, and then I shall find out more about it. She looks very ill, and altered. It may be some hopeless love affair. Poor Audrey !'

CHAPTER XXVII.

EQUAL TO THE OCCASION.

HEN Lady Laura Verschoyle left Dyne Court she promised to write to Mr Ford on their arrival in Egmont Street, and said that she should then expect to hear when they might see him there. They had now been at home more than a week, and although she feared that Audrey was not yet in a state to receive her eligible admirer, she could not longer delay writing to Mr Ford.

‘Now,’ thought her ladyship, ‘I must so word this note that his fears will not be unduly excited, for his anxiety might bring him to town at once. But I should like him to know that Audrey is too unwell to bear any agitation. Dear me, how thankful I shall be when it is all settled, and she is married ! I cannot stand these worries as I once did.’ She sat thinking thus for some time, and then wrote :—

‘MY DEAR MR FORD,—I have been wanting so much to write to you ever since my return home, which was on Saturday.’ (‘Perhaps,’ she said, ‘he’ll think that means the day before yesterday.’) ‘I know you are very anxious to hear about our dear Audrey. What a comfort it is for me to remember that now I have some one who has a right to share all my troubles on her account! Dear girl, I wish I could give a more satisfactory account of her. Her nervous system continues in such a sensitive state, that Dr Kenlis says *the slightest excitement* might bring a relapse. Still, he assures me there is no cause for anxiety. By the end of another month, if his directions are attended to, and she is kept *perfectly quiet*, she will be quite her former self. Of course I feel bound to comply with his injunctions, although, I confess, I am greatly tempted to disobey them, and ask you to come and see us. I do not think she will put up with this restriction much longer. She is constantly speaking of your promised visit. I dare not tell her that I am writing, for she would insist on seeing the letter, and she has no idea of her own weakness. This is the reason why you have no message from her. I cannot tell you, dear Mr Ford, how eagerly I look forward to certain coming events, or how sure I feel that in intrusting my beloved child to your keeping I am securing her happiness, and the happiness of her mother as well.

‘Yours most truly and affectionately,
‘LAURA VERSCHOYLE.’

‘Now I don’t think I have said so much as will lead

him to come ; nor so little that he will fancy we don't want him. I think I shall have another conversation with Audrey. She must be brought round, of course. I cannot think what madness has seized her. She gives no reason, but, like a parrot, senselessly repeats, "I cannot help it. If you let him come here, I know I shall refuse him." It is really more than human nature can endure. Job, indeed ! I never read that he had a trial of this kind. However, she shall have no new dresses ; and I am determined that I shall neither ask any one here, nor take her anywhere. I think if I can carry out this plan I am sure to succeed. I have put forth every effort to find out what she means, and I have tried Marshall in every way, but I don't believe she knows anything either, although she's as artful as can be.'

Never during the whole course of her life had her ladyship been so much puzzled. Audrey had tried by every means to avoid being left alone with her mother, as she was sure the conversation would turn upon the one subject. At Hastings these manœuvres were comparatively easy ; but now opportunities were constantly occurring, and she had to listen to long dissertations on the impossibility of their continuing to live in the same style ; Lady Laura urging that she must give up her carriage.

After despatching her letter to Mr Ford, her ladyship went into the dining-room, where her daughter was writing. She meant to try her skill once more.

' What a dismal day this is, to be sure ! November in London is quite unbearable ; one ought to be in excellent health to endure this continual fog and rain.'

'I don't think we have had much cause to complain of the weather yet, mamma : yesterday was a lovely day.'

'Well, my dear, perhaps you are able to enjoy things more than I can. My spirits are so bad, that it makes little difference to me whether the day be bright or gloomy. The disappointments I have had have been rather too much for me. But I am foolish to talk of them, for only sensitive people have any feeling for the sufferings of others. I often think of dear Lady Lascelles. She used to say I was the only one who could give her any comfort, because I so entirely sympathized with her. Poor thing ! what a martyr she was—confined to her room for years, and often for months not able to see one of her family ! Ah ! Mary had a great deal to answer for.'

'Why ?' said Audrey ; 'what had Mary to do with it ?'

'What had Mary to do with it !' returned Lady Laura in an injured tone. 'Why, everything. Until she gave up Sir Henry Skipwith, and disgraced herself by running away with the tutor, her poor mother was as well as I am.'

'Nonsense, mamma ; Lady Lascelles was not taken ill for more than two years after Mary's marriage. Besides, she had rheumatic gout.'

'Excuse me, Audrey. From the time when that ungrateful girl left her home, Lady Lascelles never knew a moment's peace of mind. Though the world chose to say she had rheumatic gout, those who loved her knew she died of a broken heart. Of course it was two years before her family noticed it. Just as it is with me. I might be walking into my grave, and until I was on the very brink of it neither you nor Charles would imagine

that I was weaker than yourselves. However, that does not much matter. When I am gone you may see differently. But I have not much to live for. I used to think that I should see my children settled and well established. I was foolish enough to think they would be pleased to see their mother happy ; but all that is gone now. The one pretends that he cannot marry because he does not feel a proper amount of affection for a pretty girl with a handsome fortune. The other has not even that poor excuse ; to an offer of every luxury and refinement that money can procure—a country seat, a town house, horses, carriages, diamonds, and *carte-blanche* to spend whatever she pleases—her only reply is : “Don’t let me see him. I cannot help it : I know I shall refuse him.” I never knew there was madness in the family, but this looks exceedingly like it.’

‘Don’t say any more, mamma,’ said Audrey. ‘All the bitter things *you* could say would not equal my own surprise. If I do not marry Mr Ford, it will be because I cannot, not because I will not.’

‘If you would give me some reason, I could listen more patiently to these ravings. You must know the cause. Is there any one else you think of marrying ?’

‘No. I do not suppose any one else will give me the opportunity.’

‘Well !’ laughed Lady Laura scornfully, ‘I am glad to find you have so much sense left. I quite agree with you there. For the last three weeks you have looked five-and-thirty—your eyes are dull, not half their usual size, and the lines under them are worse than mine. Your

hair has lost its gloss, and has just that look hair always has before it falls off. Begging that Mr Ford may not see you, indeed ! I am not quite sure that you need alarm yourself. There are not many men who would care to ask you to sit at the head of their table as you are looking at present.' Then, finding Audrey made no answer, she continued, ' Sometimes I think you must have a hopeless fancy for some one, or have fallen in love with a *mauvais sujet*.'

' Had I done so you would certainly have found it out,' replied her daughter bitterly. ' See how very soon you discovered that Mr Dynecourt was dying to marry Miss Bingham.'

' So he was,' said Lady Laura ; ' and I have no doubt that he will effect his purpose now. I saw him yesterday talking to her in Bond Street. He was leaning in at the brougham window, devouring every word she said.. He turned to see who she bowed to, turned crimson, and gave me the stiffest salutation. I am sure he need not have troubled himself to be so distant. He may marry the niece, and the aunt too, for aught I care.'

Audrey closed her desk, and walked out of the room. She went slowly upstairs, and, locking the door after her, sat down before the mirror—pale and care-worn ! Would he care for her now? The tears dropped one by one until they fell in a thick shower. So soon forgotten ; his love transferred to another ! ' Devouring every word she said.' It could only be her mother's exaggeration ; it could not be true. But the thought rankled, and she found herself hating the girl who could look upon his

face and hear his voice, while she sat hungering there as helpless as a prisoner bound hand and foot.

Soon afterwards her mother tapped at the door. 'I have just had a letter from your Aunt Spencer,' she said; 'she wants us to go to Beauwood on Thursday for a few days. The Delvins are there. She is sure to be offended if we refuse; and yet I do not care about taking you from home just now.'

'Why do you not go by yourself? My illness is sufficient excuse for me. Nobody you care about need know you have gone.'

'I should be back on Saturday,' said Lady Laura. 'But how will you get on alone?'

'Oh! I shall do very well. I would rather not go, but I think it may do you good.'

'Well, I really hope so,' replied her ladyship, 'for I require some change. So if you think you will not be very dull alone, I shall accept. She only asks me until Saturday, so I shall be sure to be home then.'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

“THE EXCEPTION PROVES THE RULE.”

EXT morning, when the letter-bag was brought to Mr Ford, he disposed of all his correspondence before he opened the letter from Lady Laura. Having carefully read it twice, he slowly folded it up, and said to himself—

‘I believe this woman is playing me false in some way; and I can’t help thinking that young Dynecourt is connected with it. I knew something had gone wrong in that quarter when he left in such a hurry; but I thought it was all on his side. The girl has been too well drilled into the idea of making a good match to allow her feelings to carry her away. Still, things don’t look clear. I am very fond of Audrey, and, as I must marry, I would prefer her to any woman I have seen. There’s a great deal of good in her which that Lady Jezebel hasn’t been able to root out. I know if she married me of her own free will she’d try to make me happy; but I don’t want her to

be forced into it if she is attached to somebody else. During the day I'll think how I had best act to get at the truth. Before I see her I shall just call upon Mr Dynecourt, casually mention her name, and then enter into a little conversation about the Verschoyles. In this way I am likely to see if there is anything underhand going on—not that I think it's likely. I can trust the young folks, but not her ladyship ; she's a slippery customer, and could wriggle herself in or out of anything.'

The result of these reflections was that Mr Ford determined to go to town on the Thursday morning, and stay a few days. Arrived in London, he went first to the Temple, apparently on some business. Finding Geofirey Dynecourt much occupied, he secured his company for dinner that evening, and then made some other calls. From Mrs Winterton he heard that Miss Verschoyle seemed quite recovered. The Verschoyles had been in town about a fortnight, she thought ; and she had met them driving, but they had not yet called upon her.

When Miss Bingham came in, she could speak of nothing but an afternoon party her uncle was going to give. 'It is an idea of mine, Mr Ford, and you must tell me what you think of it. You know, my uncle has an immense conservatory, which can be beautifully lighted. I proposed that he should invite a number of people ; engage some musicians, give us some tea, and after that let us go about, and talk, you know. Aunt declares it will be a failure, but I am sure it won't. The conservatory can be nicely warmed, and some of the plants removed, and others grouped about. I think it is charming, and

people will be delighted to come, because they have nowhere to go at this time of year.'

'It sounds very nice,' said Mr Ford. 'I am sure if you look after things it will go off well.'

'That's just it,' said Mrs Winterton; 'Selina always talks a great deal beforehand. When once she gets there, she will sit down with two or three of her friends, and never so much as think how the rest are getting on.'

'Now, aunt, I am sure I shall do nothing of the kind. You must promise to come, Mr Ford; and, oh! I wish Miss Verschoyle would come, she talks so well. You might persuade her.'

'My dear Selina,' said Mrs Winterton, 'you forget that Lady Laura has not called upon us yet.'

'Oh! but I don't believe Miss Verschoyle would mind that, and Lady Laura told us she intended to call.'

'I'll tell her how much you wish it,' replied Mr Ford, smiling at Miss Bingham's unusual enthusiasm. 'I dare say I shall manage something. When is it to be?'

'This day week. I do not want the invitation to be a long one, because it is to appear quite an impromptu affair. My uncle is not married, you know, so I am sending out the invitations for him.'

'Well, then, as I am likely to see Miss Verschoyle to-day or to-morrow, shall I take her a card?'

'Thank you, that would be much nicer than sending it; and you could explain matters to her.'

Mr Ford did not intend to call at Egmont Street until the next day. He had determined, before seeing Audrey, to have a little conversation with Geoffrey Dynecourt.

So that evening, as they sat together over their wine, the elder gentleman introduced the subject in a very easy manner, although he saw that his companion tried to evade the subject and change the conversation.

'I shall call at Egmont Street to-morrow, and then I must tell Miss Verschoyle that you dined with me, and chatted over the days we all spent together,' said Mr Ford.

At that moment Geoffrey Dynecourt hated the old man. 'Why should Mr Ford be his successful rival always? Why should he possess the old lands, and likewise come between him and the woman he worshipped? Dynecourt could not command his voice to reply, fearing he might utter some of the bitter things it seemed so hard to keep back.

'I saw Miss Bingham to-day,' Mr Ford went on, taking no notice of his guest's silence. 'She is a nice girl, and I think would make a very nice wife. You should have tried your hand there.'

'Should I?' answered Geoffrey. 'Well, it's not too late yet; I have promised to go down to some party her uncle is giving at Ealing. How much money has she?'

'What! is *that* to be the charm for you, Dynecourt? You see I don't expect you to be like most of the young men of the present day.'

'I don't see how one can help it,' said Mr Dynecourt bitterly. 'Some one says, "God made the woman for the man;" the world rather makes the man for the woman. Only fools fall in love, and they are laughed at by the very idols they bow down to. Money is the charm by which a man can win a woman's heart. Perhaps Miss

Bingham, having a fortune, may be willing to barter it for something else. Dynecourt is not a bad name, although it is threadbare. It and the family pedigree might weigh a little in the scale of an heiress, whose blood is not of the purest blue.'

'Don't talk like that, my dear fellow,' said Mr Ford; 'there are true-hearted women as well as true-hearted men.'

'Are there?' he replied. 'I don't believe it. They died out with our mothers. Women now teach us to have no faith in anything. If we are selfish, who is to cure us? If we are hardened, and worn by the world, who is to redeem us? The friends of a reckless man look forward to marriage as his salvation, his last hope; and if women have no higher aims than we have, are our superiors in cunning, and at least our equals in want of heart, in greed, and in love of self, what is there but hopeless misery for both?'

Mr Ford shook his head. 'You are too hard,' he said; 'you must remember, women are human.'

'Yes; and let them be true to their nature, and their very faults become dear. If you love a woman with your whole heart, and she loves you in return; and if, because of that divine bond, she is willing to make the best of you, and of herself, and of the life she hopes to spend with you, to others she may be stupid, weak, and frivolous, but she is the Eve of your Paradise. I believe clever women are a snare to lead one on to destruction. Miss Bingham has not that drawback, so wish me success, sir.'

'Not I,' said Mr Ford gravely, 'because I do not believe success would bring happiness.'

‘Happiness !’ replied Mr Dynecourt, laughing ; ‘I blotted that word out long ago. But it is getting late, and I am keeping you up, sir. Good-night,’ he said ; but he could not help adding, ‘When you repeat our *tête-à-tête* to Miss Verschoyle, do not omit the latter part. I feel quite safe in her knowing my opinion of her sex, as, of course, the exception proves the rule in her case.’

CHAPTER XXIX.

BEST FOR BOTH.



BOUT two o'clock next day Mr Ford presented himself at 27A, Egmont Street, and inquired for Lady Laura Verschoyle. He was told that she was out of town, staying at Beauwood for a few days. Miss Verschoyle was at home, however, —would he see her?

‘Certainly,’ said he, very much pleased that he had timed his visit so well ; and he was ushered into Audrey’s presence.

‘Mr Ford !’ she exclaimed, starting up, ‘this is quite unexpected ; I had no idea you were in town.’

‘Well, I am only paying a flying visit,’ he answered ; ‘and I was anxious to see if you were looking stronger.’

‘Oh yes ! thank you. I am quite strong now.’ Then, trying vainly to regain her usual composed manner, she went on nervously, ‘Mamma isn’t at home ; she will be

so sorry not to have seen you ; she is staying with my aunt, Lady Spencer. Have you had luncheon ?'

' Yes, thank you, my dear. I did not look forward to having the pleasure of seeing you alone. Are you not very dull in this house all by yourself ? '

' I ! Oh no, I rather like it ; though I am almost well, I am not quite strong yet, so I do not take kindly to gaiety.'

Mr Ford then asked Miss Verschoyle various questions about her health, and the benefit she had derived from the sea-air. While seemingly engrossed by her account of herself, he was noting her unusual nervousness, her heightened colour, and an evident struggle to be at ease. These things were very new to the usual self-possession and repose of Audrey's manner. After a time she began to recover herself, and to direct all her tact and energy to keeping the conversation from any but general subjects.

Richard Ford was a keen observer. During his busy life he had been accustomed to watch men and their motives narrowly. From the time he began to take an interest in Audrey, he had gauged her and her mother with tolerable correctness. He formed an opinion not wide of the mark, when he thought, ' I believe for some reason that this girl does not want me to propose to her yet. Well ! I will leave that to circumstances. But as I may not get such another opportunity as this, I will sound her about Dynecourt ; ' so he said suddenly,—

' I have a message for you from Mr Dynecourt.'

Audrey's blood seemed to withdraw, that it might rush back with greater force to her face and neck, and dye

them crimson. To meet Mr Ford's gaze was impossible ; so she gave a little nervous laugh, and said, 'Indeed ! how odd !'

'Odd !' echoed Mr Ford ; 'why ? I thought you were great friends. Are you not so ?'

'Oh ! I liked Mr Dynecourt much ; but one does not always keep up acquaintanceships formed when visiting.'

'No, but I thought he was going to call here often, and that you took a kindly interest in him.'

'But he has not called yet.'

'I am surprised to hear that,' answered Mr Ford ; 'I shall tell him you have been alone, and expected him.'

'Oh, thank you, Mr Ford,' said Audrey ; adding, 'I would rather you wouldn't say anything, but leave it to himself.'

Audrey never looked up while this was being said ; for she felt Mr Ford's eyes were upon her. And she was correct ; he was watching her narrowly.

'I am afraid,' he said, 'there has been some little misunderstanding between you that you will not tell me about. I am sorry for this, as I wanted your assistance about him. He is a great favourite of mine, and I fear he is going to do a very foolish thing.'

'What is that ?' said Audrey eagerly, forgetting herself in her anxiety for him.

'I need not say I am only telling this to you, Miss Verschoyle.'

She nodded in assent.

'Well, then, last night, over our cigars, he told me that he thought of marrying.' Though he paused, Audrey

could not say a word ; she seemed as if turned to stone. 'Of course, that is quite as it should be. The thing I object to is, that having apparently had some disappointment, which has made him bitter, he intends to propose to a certain young friend of ours, not because he thinks she will make him happy, but because she has a fortune. Many circumstances may make a man or woman marry for money, and as long as they have no other attachment I should not blame them. But if some other person possessed their heart, I should consider them to be acting wrongly. What is your opinion ?'

'Why do you ask me ?' replied Audrey coldly.

'For two reasons : I should much like to hear your ideas on the subject, knowing they would be mature and sound. Then, Mr Dynecourt made some very bitter remarks about women last night, especially as to their want of love and faith. He said that they would sacrifice every feeling for money, and that it was the true elixir by which alone their hearts were touched. He afterwards bade me repeat his sentiments to you, saying that "you might safely hear them, as you had proved yourself an exception to the rule."

'Then tell him from me that it was mean and cowardly of him,' said Audrey, flashing up ; 'I am neither better nor worse than most other women. I devoutly wish I were ;' and so saying, she rose abruptly and went to the window.

'My suspicions were correct, then,' thought Mr Ford. 'I believe she loves him ; at least there is something between them that is hidden from me. Should I be wise in

asking her to be my wife? I think I could trust her,—it may be only a passing fancy she is struggling to overcome. But what if it should be more?—I believe I might trust her still.'

In a minute Audrey turned round, saying, in her old gracious way,—‘Pray forgive my irritability, Mr Ford; a little more allowance is made for invalids than for other people.’

‘My dear, don’t speak of it. I do not want you to be vexed with our good friend Dynecourt, for I am sure he had no intention of offending you. Perhaps, poor fellow, he is only halting between two evils. When I saw him, he was determined to try for an appointment in India,—a horrid, unhealthy country, and complete banishment. I suppose it is not decided yet, but I hope he’ll not get it.’

‘Oh no,’ said poor Audrey eagerly; ‘beg him not to try, Mr Ford. You may ask him, from me, not to go there.’

‘I think it would have much greater weight with him if you asked him yourself. I am the bearer of an invitation to you, similar to one which Mr Dynecourt has already accepted;’ and Mr Ford told Audrey of the afternoon party, at which Miss Bingham was so anxious Audrey should be present.

Audrey was strongly tempted to accept the invitation. Her one longing now was to see Geoffrey Dynecourt again. Love had almost proved victorious. She knew what her decision would be had the choice to be made again between love and money. She had argued and taken herself to task in every possible way. Sometimes she had fancied her worldly wisdom had convinced her

of the folly of her passion. But some trivial circumstance some passing thought, would bring it back with renewed strength. There had been times, too, when she felt she must write to Geoffrey, and ask him to come to her. She would tell him how she repented, how she suffered. But what if he had ceased to love her, if he hated, scorned her? No! she could not write. In times gone by she had not hesitated to show her preference openly, but now she could not make an advance, although the happiness of her life seemed to depend on it. But at a word or a sign from him, she could lay her very heart bare. No wonder, then, that any chance of a meeting seemed to her like hope revived.

Mr Ford saw her hesitation, and said, 'Your mamma, I believe, intends to call upon Mrs Winterton.'

'I hardly know how to do, but I think I will write a note and say I should like very much to go, but as mamma is from home I cannot positively accept, not knowing what engagements she may have made. When do you go back?'

'To-morrow; but I shall return next week, when I hope to make a longer stay. I feel rather dull at home, now that all my friends have left me.'

'I am sure you must; a large house like yours always seems to need a large party in it,' replied Audrey.

'Yes,' said Mr Ford; 'and yet I could be very happy and contented with a companion who would let me take a great interest in all she did, and in return kindly take some interest in my favourite pursuits.'

Audrey gave a faint smile; they were nearing dangerous

ground. Still she made no effort to change the subject, as she would have done at the beginning of Mr Ford's visit. The conversation regarding Geoffrey Dynecourt had stirred within her a host of conflicting feelings—bitter anger, tender love, and dread of Geoffrey's marrying or of his going abroad. She knew now that whenever Mr Ford's offer came she had but one answer that she could give to him.

Mr Ford greatly wished to have the matter settled. He knew that if Miss Verschoyle said 'No,' he would be disappointed. He did not for a moment expect such an answer. He thought he would at all events broach the subject, and then let things drift on or not, according to circumstances. After a pause he continued, 'I am often tempted to be bold enough to ask some lady to marry me ; I think—that is, I would try to make her happy.'

'I am sure you would,' said Audrey encouragingly. It was so much easier for her to speak now.

'My dear Miss Verschoyle, I dare say you will think it very foolish of an old man like me not to marry somebody of my own age. But I am ambitious enough to wish my wife to be a very beautiful young lady.'

'Indeed,' said Audrey.

'Yes. Do you think it shows great want of sense?' asked the old gentleman, somewhat nervously.

'I do not,' replied Audrey. 'I am sure many young ladies would be very pleased to accept you.'

'As young as yourself?'

'Yes. I would rather marry you, Mr Ford, than many young men I know.'

Then, my dear Miss Verschoyle, will you accept me for I have been bold enough to hope I might see you mistress of Dyne Court.'

Audrey waited for a moment, and then said, gravely,—

'Mr Ford, you have done me an honour of which I am very unworthy. If I were to accept it, I should be still more unworthy of it. You know I value your wealth, and I think you know that I truly value your many good qualities. If I married you, I should wish to make you happy, and it is because I feel that I could not do it that I say—No.'

Mr Ford was silent. At length he said, 'Miss Verschoyle, you must not be offended at my asking it, but are not your feelings altered in some way since you left Dyne Court? I think I should have had a different answer there; your mother wished me to consider your acceptance as certain.'

'I believe mamma very much wished it; and at one time I greatly desired it myself. Even now I very much regret that it is best for both of us that I must decide as I do. I have not dealt quite fairly with you, and I am sorry you feel it. I fear I shall fall in your estimation, and lose a friend I truly value.'

'One question more, Miss Verschoyle, and pray don't think it impertinent. Are you going to marry any one else?'

'No.'

'Then your heart is still free?'

'I think my answers have come to an end, Mr Ford. I am very, very sorry I have misled you, but I do not

refuse you in order to secure my happiness with another.'

Audrey rose, as if to intimate that the interview had best terminate. The old man took her hand, and said,—

' My dear, I have no wish to pry into your secret ; you have acted honourably towards me, and in keeping with the character I always gave you credit for. If I could do anything to secure your happiness, believe me I would do it. I have had too many trials in life for disappointments to have the keenness and bitterness they have in youth. Yet this *is* a disappointment to me. But I shall strive to overcome it, so that I may rejoice with all my heart when I see you the happy wife of a worthy husband.'

Audrey could not speak. The tears were falling from her eyes, but she tried to smile on the kindly old man who, she felt, had more goodness of nature than she had before discovered.

' I shall come again,' he said, shaking her hand. ' Not just immediately, but soon ; until then, good-bye, my dear, good-bye.'

And he hurried away, saying to himself as he went,— ' That girl has a noble nature, in spite of her up-bringing ! I believe now it's something about Dynecourt.' After pondering for some time, he sighed, thinking, ' Well, it's all for the best, I suppose ; but oh ! if it had but pleased God to have spared my poor Patty ! It is hard at my age to be trying to begin life afresh, as it were ! '

CHAPTER XXX.

'I SHOULD HAVE TOLD THEE.

DURING the week the fashionable chronicle of the day announced that Lady Laura Verschoyle and Miss Verschoyle had arrived at their residence, 27A, Egmont Street, and that Captain C. Egerton Verschoyle had taken his departure for the north. But it did not intimate that Miss Dorothy Fox had left Fryston Grange for Holberton Hall, Leeds.

Still, so it was ; and on the day fixed Mrs Hanbury went to the Great Northern Railway Station to see Dorothy depart.

Grace had observed with anxiety that there was a change in her sister. Her spirits had been uneven, her gaiety forced, and there was a nervousness in her appearance quite foreign to her nature.

'I am so sorry to leave thee, Grace,' she said.

'And I, dear, am sorry to part with you. We shall miss you dreadfully. You must write me all the north-

country news. And, Dolly, after you have visited the Crewdsons let me know what they are like ; and,' she whispered, laughing, 'you must tell me whether you intend to marry Josiah or not.'

'I can tell thee that now,' said Dorothy, with a tremor in her voice. 'I have made up my mind—I cannot like Josiah.'

'Then, my dear child, why are you going to Leeds ?'

But there was no time to answer, the train was already in motion, and in a few minutes it was out of sight.

Dorothy's words added to Grace's perplexity. 'I have been wrong,' she thought, 'to let her see so much of Captain Verschoyle. But it never occurred to me she would take any fancy to him. Perhaps he may have seen the impression he was producing, and so have hurried his departure. I am sure he is too honourable to take any advantage. But I am certainly to blame ; I ought to have been more careful. Poor little Dolly !' And all the way home, and during the day, Grace was anxiously thinking thus about her young sister.

Nor was she the only person whose mind seemed to be filled and possessed with thoughts of Dorothy.

Every day since his arrival at Darington Captain Verschoyle had gone into York to meet the train by which he expected that Dorothy would come, and each day he had been disappointed. He made up his mind to go once more, and then to call upon her aunt, and see if she had arrived without his seeing her. All the reflections and workings of Charles Verschoyle's mind at this time it would be simply impossible for us to indicate. Some-

times he told himself that if he did not offer to marry the girl he would be an abominable vagabond, a blackguard who deserved to be kicked by every honourable man, and to be 'cut' by every honest woman. At other times he said to himself that he was the greatest fool in the world. Who could believe that the grandson of an earl, and an officer in a crack regiment, would give up everything and everybody to marry the daughter of a country shopkeeper? The whole thing was absurd ; and he must simply get out of the mess in the best way he could. When Dorothy did not arrive he worked himself into a fever, and finally made up his mind to call upon Miss Abigail Fletcher, who, to his surprise, was from home—'staying at Malton.' The maid told him that she thought she had heard something about Miss Dorothy being expected. Jane would be sure to know ; only Jane had a holiday, and wouldn't be back until Monday. So until Monday Captain Verschoyle had to wait, chafing in fear that something had happened which would prevent him from seeing Dorothy again.

To Josiah Crewdson, Dorothy's visit was an event such as had never before occurred in his lifetime. As he stood waiting for the train he felt quite sick and faint from excitement, oppressed with a nervous dread that something unforeseen had detained her. But in another minute Dorothy arrived, and soon Josiah was wildly dashing against passengers and porters in order to possess himself of her luggage. After the first greetings were over, Dorothy was silent. Oppressed by the feeling that she had nothing to say, she excused herself on the plea of

being tired, and Josiah, in his delight at seeing her readily forgave her taciturnity.

Holberton Hall was a heavy-looking, square, stone-built house. Josiah thought it had never before presented so dull and gloomy an appearance, and he remarked, apologetically,—

‘My sisters don’t care for flowers, but the place might be made much more cheerful-looking. There is no occasion for my living here at all. We might get another house if—thou liked, Dorothy.’

Dorothy looked in the opposite direction, ‘from coyness,’ as Josiah thought, but in reality to prevent him from seeing the tears with which her eyes were filled. Her deception seemed to come before her in all its force, and she felt that she should be miserable until she had told Josiah the real state of her mind.

The Miss Crewdsons came out to meet Dorothy, and delivered themselves of a set speech of formal greeting. They seemed to regard her engagement as a settled business; so that Dorothy felt herself to be an impostor, felt as if she had come into the family upon false pretences. Oh, how many times before the dreary evening came to an end did she wish that she had gone direct from Fryston to her own home!

Josiah did all he could to amuse her, making, as Jemima afterwards said, a ‘complete mountebank of himself.’ But it was all to no purpose. The gloomy house and the sombre room oppressed the girl; and the two stern, hard-featured women made her shy and timid. More than all, the consciousness that she was acting de-

ceitfully filled her with misery. She rejoiced, therefore, when it was time to retire to her own room, although only for the satisfaction of indulging her grief, and sobbing herself to sleep.

Dorothy's chief perplexity was about the Miss Crewdsons. She felt she had the courage to kill Josiah's hopes and crush his dearest wish; but how could she face Jemima and Kezia, after they knew that she did not intend to marry their brother? Yet what was to be done? She could not stay a week there deceiving everybody. No, it would be better to have it over as soon as possible, and then go to Aunt Abigail's at York. There she had fixed her longing hope of meeting Charles Verschoyle once more—only once. Dorothy was too young and unworldly to have any doubt of the man who knew that he had her heart in his keeping. If it were not for those dreadful sisters she would tell Josiah the very next day. But how would they take it? what might they not do to her?

It was a pity that Dorothy could not have overheard the opinions which at that very time the sisters were exchanging with each other on their brother's choice. Her appearance they regarded with pious horror. She was a child, a baby-faced doll; and they charitably inferred that if she *had* any sense, she took care that nobody should give her credit for it. They quoted the Proverbs of Solomon so freely concerning her, that had any one overheard them he would have felt dubious as to Dorothy's moral character. Finally, they agreed in declaring that they would not leave a stone unturned to prevent the entrance

into the Crewdson family of such a lackadaisical creature.

Next day, when Josiah had left, Jemima began to speak about Dorothy's dress. She said they were surprised to find that Dorothy had departed from that plainness of apparel which it so much became Friends to adhere to. Surely her parents could not approve of it. When Dorothy said she had her parents' sanction, both the sisters elevated their eyebrows with an air of incredulity and astonishment. With no little emphasis, they said that such vanity would not be permitted in their brother's wife. *She* must be consistent, and wear a cap and bonnet suited to women whose aims were higher than the adornment of a miserable body which worms would soon destroy.

Dorothy was silent. Only in this way could she keep down the tears which threatened to come in a torrent. At another time her spirit would have been roused, and she would have done battle bravely with the Miss Crewdsons for presuming to lecture her for doing what she had her parents' authority to do. But 'conscience makes cowards of us all,' and Dorothy knew that she was acting wrongly. She felt she should never have placed herself in this position. She could not defend herself without speaking of a decision which, until Josiah knew it, she had no right to mention to any of his family.

Josiah was to return at five, and Dorothy thought that hour would never come. About three the sisters proposed to take her with them to visit the sick and poor. They said it was their day for ministering to the wants of their district. Dorothy, however, plucked up courage to refuse. This gave rise to many remarks on her want of

charity and slothfulness. But the clock warned them that unless they went off speedily they could not return by the time Josiah would be home, and they left her. She was not long by herself, for the thought of Dorothy being at home to welcome him had given such impetus to Josiah's usually slow and methodical movements, that his business was over by three o'clock. Before another hour had elapsed he was in his own dining-room, anxiously inquiring of Dorothy the cause of her tearful eyes and weary looks.

'Indeed, it is nothing,' she answered, with quivering mouth; for even *his* tenderness touched her now. For a moment there was silence, then with a sudden effort she said—

'Josiah, I want to speak to thee very seriously. If we may be disturbed here, take me somewhere else.'

A sickly fear crept over Josiah. 'She does not like Jemima and Kezia,' he thought to himself, 'and she is going to tell me that she cannot marry me.'

'Come into the garden, Dorothy; there is a summer-house there nobody ever goes to.' On the way he said to her, 'Thou mustn't mind sisters; they have not ways like thine. But then thou needst not see them often, and I would take care they should never worry thee.'

Dorothy did not answer.

'It would be quite different,' he continued. 'Here they are the mistresses, and they feel as if everything belonged to them. But when they only came as visitors it wouldn't be so, or if they were cross and cranky thou

needst not mind them. Oh! Dorothy, don't let them make any difference about me.'

Still she did not say a word until they reached the square formal summer-house, with the bench along its sides, and the round table in the middle. When they were seated she said,—

'Josiah, I am going to tell thee something which will make thee think very poorly of me.'

'No, Dorothy,' said Josiah, with a shake of his head, 'nothing can make me think poorly of thee.'

'Thou knowest,' she continued, 'that I like thee very much indeed. From the first time I saw thee I thought thee very good and kind, but I—' and here she paused.

'Do not love me,' he said, finishing the sentence. 'I know that. I don't expect it to come all at once. Sometimes I fear that thou wilt find it impossible, I am so awkward and stupid; but, Dorothy, thou said thou wouldest try.'

'Yes, I did; but, Josiah,'—and she leaned her arms on the table that she might cover her face with her hands,—'I cannot even try now.'

There was silence for several minutes, and then Josiah said in a husky voice, 'I ought to have known it. An uncouth fellow, not able even to tell thee what I feel—what else could I expect from thee?'

'This thou might have expected,' said Dorothy, looking at him fixedly, 'that having given thee and my father my word that I would try, I should have avoided all temptation that might lead me to break that word. When I felt that I could never do as thou wished, I should have told

thee, and not acted deceitfully by coming here among thee and thy relations.'

'Are sisters making thee decide thus? Thou hadst not made up thy mind before thou came here?'

'Yes, I had.'

Josiah's face seemed to become suddenly sharp and old. Taking hold of her arm in his newly-awakened fear, he said, 'Dorothy!—Dorothy! it isn't somebody else?'

She gave him no answer

'Oh!' he groaned, resting his face upon the table, 'I didn't think of that,—I didn't think of that.'

'Josiah, don't give way like that,' exclaimed Dorothy, surprised and alarmed at the sight of his misery. 'Oh what shall I do?' she continued, as her tears fell thick and fast upon his hands.

Josiah immediately tried to recover himself. 'I shall be all right in a minute,' he said. 'Thou must not mind me—only it came on me so sudden.'

'Josiah, if I could only tell thee how sorry I am to grieve thee! I—I thought it would disappoint thee, but I did not know it would pain thee like this.'

'Didst thou not?' he said, trying to smile. 'Ah, I have been a sad bungler, Dorothy. My love for thee made me dumb when I most wanted to speak to thee. Does thy father know of this?'

'Father! Oh no!'

'But thou wilt tell him soon?

Dorothy looked down as she answered slowly,—'I do not think I shall. I—I—do—not intend to marry anybody else.'

'Not—marry—any one—else,' repeated Josiah in amazement. 'Then have I misunderstood thee? Thou wouldst not willingly give me pain, I know—but, please—Dorothy—tell me the truth at once. Dost thou love some one, not only better than me—but so well as to prevent thee from ever becoming ~~my~~ wife?'

Dorothy hesitated, but seeing his anxious face, she answered,—'Yes; but, Josiah, oh! do listen. It is some one whom my principles forbid me to marry. I may never see him again, and if I do, I shall part with him for ever;' and at the thought Dorothy's firmness gave way, and she sobbed aloud.

Josiah did not ask the name of his rival, but he rightly guessed who ~~he~~ was. Forgetting his own troubles, however, he now tried to soothe and comfort Dorothy. Thinking that she would feel more happy away from his family, he suggested, and she agreed, that it would be better for her to go to Aunt Abigail as soon as she could. Not the next day perhaps, because Aunt Abigail was still at Malton; but the day after. Her aunt would then be at home, and aware of her movements. Jemima and Kezia were to be told nothing until after Dorothy's departure, so that they might not tease and worry her with their cutting remarks.

It was now considerably past five o'clock, and they prepared to return to the house.

'Josiah, say that thou forgivest me,' said Dorothy.

'With all my heart.'

'And that thou wilt try to forget me?'

'Never,—I shall always love thee, Dorothy. Thou

wouldst not wish to deprive me of that comfort ? '

' No,' said Dorothy ; and she felt, for the first time, that if she had never seen Charles Verschoyle, it would not have been quite impossible for her to have cared for Josiah Crewdson.

CHAPTER XXXI.

KEZIA PLAYS THE SPY.

OTWITHSTANDING all that Dorothy had said to Josiah at their recent interview, he felt it impossible for him to abandon all hope. Might she not yet overcome this fancy which was never to be gratified, and then after a time get to like him? She had been so kind and gentle to him since their meeting in the summer-house, that such a supposition did not seem to be entirely chimerical.

Aunt Abigail had written to say that she would expect her niece on the day mentioned, and the day had now arrived. Josiah, to save Dorothy annoyance, had offered to tell his sisters that she wanted to return home sooner than she had at first intended, and wishing to spend as much time as possible with her aunt, she thought it best to shorten her visit to them.

'Oh, certainly, by all means,' said Jemima; 'as she did not come here on our account, we have no wish to

detain her: although it is paying thee a very poor compliment, Josiah.'

'It's quite what I expected,' said Kezia, with the smile of infallible intuition. 'Ours is no house for the frivolous and worldly; it is a pity that Dorothy came here at all.'

'It *is* a *great* pity,' replied Josiah, feeling himself getting more angry than he cared to show them. 'Thou and Jemima seem to forget how young Dorothy is. As to her being frivolous and worldly, she is nothing of the kind; she is cheerful and gay, as a girl should be. When she is as old as either of you she will be sedate enough.'

Now, few women can bear to be told they are old in comparison with other women whom they know to be young. They may own their age, even boast of it, but they never care about being reminded of it by other people. Therefore, though the Miss Crewdsons were quite innocent of trying to make themselves more juvenile than they really were, Josiah could not have cut his sisters more surely, or raised their indignation more speedily, than he did by this taunt, which was all the worse to bear as each of them would have died before she would have acknowledged her annoyance.

'The train leaves at 2.40,' added Josiah, 'and I will meet Dorothy at the station. I must see Stephenson this morning, so I shall walk into Leeds, and Dorothy can have the carriage.'

'Certainly,' returned Jemima: 'hast thou any further orders to leave? for I suppose it has come to thy considering it to be our place to obey thee.'

'Nonsense, Jemima, don't take such fancies,' said Jo-

siah, fearing that unless he tried to mollify them a little, his sisters might vent their vexation on Dorothy. 'She cannot walk, and I thought it would save a cab.'

Waiting for no further argument, Josiah went out through the back way into the garden, at the end of which, according to appointment, he met Dorothy.

'Hast thou told them? What did they say?' she asked excitedly.

'Nothing; but I see they are a little vexed; so if they speak somewhat sharply, thou must not mind it. They do not mean ill.'

'Thou only saidst that I was going?' said Dorothy timidly.

'Yes, that was all. Need I say more at present, Dorothy? Perhaps some day thou mayest get to like me a little; that is, if thou art sure that thou dost not intend marrying—the—the other one,' he blurted out.

Dorothy shook her head: 'I will not deceive thee again; and thou wouldst not wish to marry me if I had no love for thee, Josiah?'

'No: only sometimes, after many years perhaps, when people don't meet they forget their love.'

'But not what love is like,' she said sadly.

'Dorothy, forgive me—only one more question. Art thou quite sure thou hast no intention to marry him?'

'Quite sure.'

'And dost thou think thy strength is sufficient for thee to say No?'

'I think strength will be given to me,' she answered; 'for I am trying very hard to do my duty.'

Josiah took her hand in both of his, and looking at her—his honest, every-day face lit up by love—he said, 'God bless and help thee, Dorothy!' and Dorothy's voice failing, she tightened her grasp, and tried to smile on him through her tears.

Twelve o'clock had struck, and still the Miss Crewdsons sat puzzling over and speculating about the cause of this sudden departure. They were certain that there was something more in it than met the eye ; but what that something could be they failed to discover. Dorothy had been in and out several times during the morning, but meeting with no other response to her remarks than 'yes' or 'no,' she had betaken herself to her own room, where she was sitting lonely and dispirited.

For the twentieth time had Kezia asked Jemima, 'What can it be?'—for the twentieth time she had received from her sister the answer, that time would show, when a loud peal at the bell startled them both. Before they had run through their category of probable visitors, the maid opened the door, walked up to Jemima, and put a card into her hand, saying, 'He's asked for Miss Dorothy Fox, and please, he's waiting.' Jemima looked at the card and read aloud, 'Captain Charles Egerton Verschoyle, 17th Lancers.'

Jemima Crewdson boasted that she was 'never taken aback.' Seldom had she had greater reason to pride herself on this than when, without any exclamation or comment, she said, 'Take this to her, and tell her that he is waiting to see her.'

The girl took the card to Dorothy, who breathlessly

demanded where the visitor was, and whether any one was with him. Concluding from Dorothy's excitement that the good-looking young man was her real sweetheart, and not being devoted to the house of Crewdson, the servant smiled grimly as she descended the stairs, saying, 'And I for one shouldn't be sorry neither.'

How Dorothy managed to fly down-stairs, pass the dining-room door, and get into the room where Charles Verschoyle stood waiting for her, she did not know ; it seemed to her as if one minute she were reading his name, and the next that she was sobbing sweet and bitter tears in his arms. The joy she felt at seeing the man whom she now knew to be far dearer to her than she had hitherto dreamt of, the conflicts she had gone through for his sake, and the misery she had endured for the last few weeks, broke down all her firm resolutions, and drove from her mind everything but the glad thought that '*he*' was with her, and nothing now could harm her.

Captain Verschoyle was at a loss to understand the meaning of this outburst. He only saw that something had gone wrong and distressed 'his darling,' as he now called her, and that the sight of her tears made him feel more pitiful and tender than the griefs of all the women he had ever known before. He soothed and caressed her, and called her every endearing name which falls so sweetly from the mouth of a lover, until Dorothy's tears ceased falling, and she began to awaken to the realities of her position.

'How didst thou know that I was here?' she asked

‘They will be so angry Oh ! thou oughtst not to have come.’

‘Why not? and who are *they* who will be angry?’ he said. ‘Are these people your relations?’

‘No.’

‘Well, then, there can be nothing so very extraordinary in my calling to see you. Say I am a friend of your sister’s, and wanted to know if you had any message to send to her ; that I went to your aunt’s, and not finding you I came here. No one *could* be angry about that.’

‘But thou art a soldier,’ said Dorothy, shaking her head in dissent to his arguments.

‘Suppose I am, I am not going to fight them ; but tell me, dear, why were you so distressed at seeing me?’

‘Because I have been so miserable of late.’

Feeling that he was probably the cause of her misery, Captain Verschoyle should have looked less pleased, as he put his arm again round her and tried to draw her towards him. But Dorothy had recovered herself, so she turned from him and sat down in a chair, while he stood looking at her. ‘I have been so unhappy,’ she continued, ‘because I ought never to have spoken as I did to thee in the garden.’

‘Why not?’ he exclaimed hurriedly. ‘Was it not true? Dorothy, tell me, do you love me?’ He was kneeling by her side, with his face close to hers, so that she looked into his eyes with her own full of truth and love.

‘Yes,’ she said slowly, ‘I love thee with all my heart ; but I ought never to have shown it to thee.’

‘And why?’

‘Because I knew it was wrong. When I began to think so much of thee, I ought to have gone home.’

‘Oh! don’t say that, darling.’

Matters were beginning to look a little brighter now, and Captain Verschoyle almost smiled as he remembered the sharp pain he felt when he thought Dorothy was going to say she did not care for him.

‘But it is true,’ she continued: ‘all this time I have been disobeying father, and deceiving Josiah Crewdson.’

‘Josiah Crewdson! What has he to do with it?’

Dorothy looked down abashed. ‘Josiah wanted me to marry him, and I promised father I would try to like him, and I told Josiah the same, and now—’

‘Well!’

‘Of course, I cannot.’

Captain Verschoyle was silent; not because he did not love the girl, but he was suspicious,—and not without cause, for the world had taught him two or three rather bitter lessons. Was she trying to entangle him into making her an offer of marriage? Perhaps her sister had prompted her to do it. Well, if she had told the Hanburys there was no backing out of it, and, after all, he should have to marry a shop-keeper’s daughter. So he said, very coldly, ‘Why? Is it your intention to marry some one else?’

Dorothy looked up; his voice grated upon her ear, but in a moment she dismissed the suspicion. Her love told her—knowing as she did that they could not marry—what his pain must be. Her heart seemed to give a great

surge, and, laying her head on his shoulder, she hid her face and cried, 'Oh ! Charles, if thou hadst been the poorest man in all the world I would never have ceased to entreat father ; but I know if I disobeyed him and forsook my principles, we could expect no blessing and no happiness.'

'What *do* you mean, child ?' exclaimed Captain Verschoyle, puzzled by Dorothy's words, certain of her love, however, and at rest regarding her duplicity. 'You say you will not marry this Crewdson, but surely if I ask your father for you, you will marry me ?'

'No. Thou art a soldier, and for that reason father would never give his consent. It would be against our principles, and though I feel that were I called upon I could willingly die for thee, I could not disobey my parents when I know they are acting rightly.'

'Such love as this is not worth having,' he said, pushing her from him. 'I am offering for your sake'—and he thought he was speaking the truth—'to give up my friends, position, and all hope of advancement in life ; and you tell me that you love me very much, but if your father says "No," you could not think of disobeying him. Do you suppose that I expect my mother ever to give her consent ? Very likely neither she nor my sister would ever speak to me again. But if I had determined to marry you I would not be deterred though every relation I have turned their backs upon me.'

'But *I* feel that God's face would be turned from me.'

Captain Verschoyle gave an impatient shrug. 'I know nothing of such bigotry,' he said contemptuously. 'If

you think me such a Pariah, why did you lead me to suppose that you cared for me ?'

Dorothy sat with her face in her hands rocking herself to and fro in hopeless misery—such a picture of heart-broken despair, that all Charles Verschoyle's anger gave way, and kneeling down before her he said,—‘Dorothy, my own, my darling, don't listen to me. I am a brute to say such things, but I did not know how I loved you ; look at me, dear, I'll give up everything in the world for you. I'll sell out, and we'll go and live in the country. That's right, smile at me again, dearest. I'll turn Quaker, and then my Dolly won't say No. Will she ?’

But Dorothy had no power then to reply, and when she had, Captain Verschoyle jumped up suddenly, exclaiming, ‘Confound that woman !’ and walking to the window called out, ‘Do you wish to come in this way, madam ?’

To Dorothy's unspeakable horror, the figure which turned away was Kezia Crewdson.

CHAPTER XXXII.

LOVING AND LOSING.

HEN young Love has been suddenly put to flight, he is very shy of settling down again. Therefore, although it was nearly half an hour before Captain Verschoyle left Holberton Hall, the interval was taken up by a comparatively sober and business-like conversation.

Dorothy was in a great state of trepidation about Kezia Crewdson. Captain Verschoyle declared, however, that she could not have been at the window two minutes before he saw her, although, had she stood for two hours, he said, she could not have seen them. He *said* this, not really believing it, being certain that Miss Crewdson's curiosity had been gratified by a very romantic tableau. But then, it was not likely she would say anything about it, as that would be telling upon herself. However, the thing was done, and they must make the best of it, and carry it off as circumstances demanded.

He was delighted to hear that Dorothy was leaving for York ; and began to speculate if they could not travel in the same carriage.

‘ Josiah is going with me to the station, and Aunt Abigail will meet me at York,’ said Dorothy.

‘ Oh, that is just the thing. I want to be introduced to your aunt, so that I can call and see you. You want to see me again soon, Dorothy, do you not?’

‘ Yes.’

‘ Well, then, we shall meet at the station. I shall look out for you. 2.40 you said? All right, and don’t fidget about that old Tabbyskins, dear ; whatever she accuses you of, deny it.’

‘ Oh, Charles ! but I could not.’

‘ Oh, Dolly ! yes, you could,’ he whispered, laughing at her grave face. Then giving her a most courteous bow in case they should be watched, he walked away, and Dorothy shut the door, her heart sinking with every retreating step he took.

Try as she would, she could not persuade herself that Kezia had not seen them. If she had—all Dorothy’s senses seemed to forsake her at the thought. What might she not do? Write to her father, perhaps ; and then—she should die of shame. While she was striving to convince herself that they had been unseen, Ann came to announce that luncheon was ready. Dorothy, unable to look at any one, and feeling it required all her resolution to keep her teeth from chattering, found herself in the dining-room before the sisters, who, by practising the feminine habit of ignoring an offender, and finding

an immense deal to say to each other, gave Dorothy time to recover herself. She felt it was needful for her to say something about a visit to her in a house where they were mistresses and she was a guest. So, when she was able to command her voice sufficiently, she took an opportunity of saying, 'It was Charles Verschoyle who came here this morning ; mother knows him, and he is a friend of Grace's.'

'So I should think,' replied Jemima, but without more sharpness in her voice than usual.

'He had been to Aunt Abigail's, and they told him I was here,' Dorothy went on to say. 'He is going back to London soon, and will tell Grace he has seen me.'

'It was very fortunate that thou hadst not gone,' said Kezia, 'but perhaps he knew the hour when thou wert going. I suppose thou expected him ?'

'No, I did not,' and Dorothy found courage to look up and meet Kezia's eyes. They looked at her as they usually did ; there was no terrible light in them as if they had witnessed an awful secret, which would soon be communicated to all whom it might and might not concern. Indeed, Kezia was particularly gracious in pressing her to eat more, fearing that she had lost her appetite, and reminding her that she had a journey before her. So Dorothy drew breath, and began to think that Charles Verschoyle was right, and that Kezia had seen nothing. So great a calamity being averted, caused her spirits to rise at once, and she left Holberton Hall smiling and gracious, and thanking the sisters for the kindness they had shown to her.

Josiah was at the station waiting for her, smiling, that she might see no trace of his flagging spirits and heavy heart. They were in good time, but Josiah was restless, and kept going backward and forward to see if the luggage was labelled, or if the ticket office was open. Dorothy wished he would sit quiet for a few minutes, as she wanted to tell him that Charles Verschoyle had been to see her. But whenever she was about to begin, Josiah started off; and now, unless she made haste, she feared the subject of her communication would arrive before she could announce his advent.

When Josiah sat down again, Dorothy said, quickly, 'I had a visitor this morning; Charles Verschoyle came to see me.'

Josiah only grasped his umbrella tighter, and answered, — 'Oh! did he?'

Then there was a pause until he was sufficiently calm to ask, 'Are you going to see him again?'

'Yes, he said he was going to York by this train, and he would see me at the station.'

Here Josiah jumped up in a great hurry, saying he was quite sure the ticket-office must be open by this time; and without another word he went off. When he returned, some five or six minutes later, he found that Captain Verschoyle had joined Dorothy, and was carrying on a most animated conversation with her.

The Captain condescended to remember that he had met Mr Crewdson before, and to bestow on him a formal shake of the hand. He then announced that, thinking Miss Fox might have some parcel or message for Mrs

Hanbury, he had taken the liberty of calling upon her at Holberton Hall. To which Josiah replied, 'Thank thee.' Why he should be thankful he did not know, however, for never had he felt greater animosity towards any one than towards this man, whose soldier-like appearance, handsome face, and easy manner, made him feel his own defects a hundred-fold more keenly than ever.

'I think we may as well take our seats, Miss Fox,' said Captain Verschoyle, relieving Dorothy of her cloak and travelling-bag. Josiah, thus excluded, walked after them up the platform, watched Captain Verschoyle make all the arrangements for Dorothy's comfort, and then stood uncomfortable and ill at ease at the carriage door. Here he was rather unceremoniously pushed aside by an old gentleman, who jumped in in a great hurry, and, regardless of the cloak and umbrellas ostentatiously spread out to guard it, took the seat opposite Dorothy, shut the door, and then looked out of the window, and said, 'Ah, how d'ye do, Crewdson? This young lady a friend of yours? Going to York? Very wrong to send her alone—might meet some impertinent fellow on the way. I'll take care of her. Introduce me.'

Josiah, taken aback by this unusual familiarity in a bowing acquaintance, stammered out, 'Thou art very good. Dorothy Fox—'

'Oh!' said the old gentleman, interrupting him. Then taking off his hat, he repeated, 'Dorothy Fox, and my name, for our journey entirely at your service, is Harry Egerton. Now, Miss Fox, society permits us after this to be as polite or as rude as we please to each other.'

'I hope I shall not be rude, and I do not think that such is thy intention,' said Dorothy, laughing.

'You are ignoring me altogether, sir,' said Captain Verschoyle, touching him on the arm.

'No, I am not,' answered the old man, gruffly, turning round; 'but I've seen *you* before this morning; I came up in the same train with you.' Though he intended to be very severe, at the sight of the expression on his godson's face, Mr. Egerton could not refrain from winking his eye.

'Thou wilt let us know of thy safe arrival, Dorothy? and perhaps while thou art at thy aunt's I shall be at York on business, and come and see thee,' said Josiah.

'Oh yes, do,' said Dorothy. Then seeing a frown on Captain Verschoyle's face, she added, 'that is, if I am there; but I shall not stay long. Farewell, Josiah! Do be careful; don't stand on the step—the train is moving, thou might be thrown down.'

As the train went off, Josiah, in the bitterness of his heart, wished he *had* been thrown down, and that it had gone over him. In spite of what he told Dorothy about being glad they had met even if she could never care for him, he asked himself now why he had ever seen her, if seeing her was only to make him hopeless and wretched. Had his father only brought him up differently—taught him to say what he thought like other men—made him feel certain that the thing he was doing was the right thing to do, matters might have been different. But what chance had he with a man like Charles Verschoyle? None. Telling his clerks that he was particularly engaged

and could see no one, Josiah went into his office, flung himself down upon his chair, and declared to himself that he did not care what became of him.

In the mean time his sisters were anxiously awaiting his return, full of the importance of the awful disclosure which Kezia had to make. She had no intention of prefacing her revelation with—‘Happening to be passing the window,’ or, ‘Not having an idea that any one was in the room.’ No, Miss Crewdson gave her unvarnished testimony to the truth. Considering it was her duty to know what her brother’s future wife could have to do with a man belonging to a profession abominable in the sight of a peace-loving community, she had walked into the garden, and stood at the window of the room, looking at them until she had attracted their attention. If what had passed before her eyes did not stagger Josiah and make the scales which blinded him fall from his eyes, the sisters considered it would be their duty to lay the matter before the Society. And here they were only acting according to what their consciences dictated. No malice or dislike to Dorothy in any way impelled them. For had she been entirely ‘after their own hearts,’ the last few hours would have lowered her so much in their estimation as to make them think her unworthy to be the wife of any man bearing an honest name.

Josiah at length arrived, hot and breathless, having walked very quickly, to prevent his being more than half-an-hour late for dinner. He expected to be met with black looks and angry faces, instead of which, Kezia only remarked that he looked very warm, and Jemima re-

proached him mildly for hurrying when there was no occasion to do so.

'Had Josiah been quick-witted and sharp, he would have been certain that something was about to happen. The sisters had agreed that he should have his dinner in peace ; and during the meal they made themselves so unusually pleasant and agreeable, that even Josiah wondered what could be the reason of this sudden change. 'I dare say,' thought he, 'they want to show me how glad they are that she is gone ;' and he heaved a sigh so deep that Jemima remarked, 'One would think that thy mind was ill at ease, Josiah.'

Josiah denied the assertion most emphatically ; whereupon Kezia exclaimed mournfully, that she wished his sisters could say the same ; but it was best to prepare himself, for they had a blow in store for him, a blow dealt him by a human hand, and a hand too that they had once thought to see joined with his own. Josiah being somewhat obtuse as to metaphorical allusions, did not grasp Kezia's meaning, and sat silently staring first at one and then at the other, hoping to get some explanation. Jemima, who was in all her dealings essentially practical, said,—

'Kezia, Josiah doth not understand thee ; thou hadst best be plain with him, and in as few words as possible tell him what thou hast discovered.'

So urged, Kezia commenced, and soon the plain truth was made known to Josiah, who listened with an unmoved countenance.

'Thou art quite positive that thou saw all this ? Thou fancied nothing ?' he said.

Kezia allowed this imputation on her veracity to pass unnoticed. She merely stated that *she stood looking in at the window until the man walked up to her and asked if she wanted to come in.*

‘And did Dorothy know that it was thou?’

‘Certainly she did.’

‘And she made no remark upon it afterwards?’

‘No.’

Josiah relapsed into silence until Jemima could bear it no longer; so she said rather sharply, ‘Thou art taking it very coolly, Josiah.’

‘Am I? What am I to do?’

‘What art thou to do?’ she echoed; ‘I think if I were a man I should not require to be told what *I* should do, when the woman engaged to be my wife had been seen—in the arms of another,’ and Miss Crewdson felt as if her maidenly estate had been offended by naming such a situation.

‘Perhaps not,’ said Josiah slowly, ‘but Dorothy Fox is not, and never was, engaged to be my wife. I have nothing, therefore, to say about it, and, of course, neither of you will ever speak of it to any one.’

‘Dear Josiah!’ exclaimed both the Miss Crewdsons in a breath, ‘thou hast taken a load off our minds.’

‘I always thought,’ said Kezia, ‘that our brother had more sense than to marry Dorothy Fox. She is a bad, forward girl, Josiah, and mark my words—’

But at the moment it seemed much more likely that he would mark her body, for jumping up suddenly he exclaimed, ‘Hold thy tongue, she is nothing of the sort:

though she will not marry me, I love her better than anybody in the world, and I won't let any one speak against her.'

Now, how is it that men will make such fatal blunders? In one moment Josiah had undone all that he most desired to compass. His two sisters would not have spoken had he said nothing; but now—nothing would prevent them 'letting justice have its course.' Jemima therefore said coldly, 'Kezia, I do not know that thou and I are called upon to listen to the vain ravings of a senseless boy; we will leave him, trusting that a better spirit will be given to him. But, Josiah, remember we are not going to screen faults which we ought to expose. We shall speak to some elder, and ask him to inform Nathaniel Fox that his daughter, during her stay here, and while we believed her to be the engaged wife of our brother, was seen in the embrace of a strange man, and he a soldier.'

'It's false!' roared Josiah, 'and Nathaniel Fox knows of it already.'

'Knows of what?' cried both the sisters.

Josiah with a great gulp at the final extinguishing of all his hopes, said, like a brave, true-hearted man as he was, 'The man was Charles Verschoyle, her accepted husband.'

CHAPTER XXXIII.

EXPLANATION AND RECONCILIATION.

ATURDAY had come round, Lady Laura had returned from Beauwood, and Audrey had determined that she would see Geoffrey Dynecourt again. If possible, she would go to Miss Bingham's afternoon party ; and all her energies were now applied to obtain her mother's aid in accomplishing this. She had resolved to keep Mr Ford's offer a secret from Lady Laura. She did not repent her refusal of him, but felt great comfort in knowing that she had settled her fate so far. If she had the slightest hope that Geoffrey Dynecourt still loved her, she believed she would be happy ; but though sometimes she indulged in delicious dreams of forgiveness and renewed love, they generally ended in tears and despair.

Lady Laura was in excellent spirits. Her visit to Beauwood had been a success. Lady Spencer had made her

self very agreeable to her, and she had been pressed to visit them again at Christmas.

'Considering all things, I am very glad I went,' she said.

'I am glad too,' said Audrey; 'I think it has done you good, mamma; you are looking much better.'

'And how did you get on without me, dear? I thought of you constantly.'

'Oh! I managed very well. I went out in the mornings with Marshall, and yesterday afternoon Mr Ford came to see me.'

Lady Laura started up from the sofa and exclaimed, 'Mr Ford! Audrey, you don't say so. Why, what did you do?'

'Oh! I told him I was not well enough to go with you, but that I was gradually getting better, though not quite strong yet.'

'And he—he did not enter into anything personal?'

'He said he was in town for a day or two, and he wanted to see how I was.'

'And you were quite cordial to him?'

'Yes, quite; I told him I was very glad to see him. He is coming again to go to an afternoon party which Mr Marjoribanks, Miss Bingham's uncle, is to give at Ealing; and he brought us an invitation. He said he told Mrs Winterton he knew you intended calling upon her, and as they were very anxious that we should come, he offered to bring the card. I thought you would accept, and told Mr Ford so, and I sent a little note to Miss Bingham.'

'That was quite right, my love,' said Lady Laura, whose

hopes now began to revive with all their old force. 'Did he say that he had heard from me ?'

'No.'

'And his manner was the same as ever ?'

'Quite the same.'

'How very strange that he should have come the day I was away ! but everything seems to have turned out well,' and she looked sharply at her daughter, but Audrey's face was unreadable. 'Then there was nothing unpleasant during the interview, and you parted friends ?' she added.

'Yes.'

Lady Laura went over with the intention of kissing Audrey, but finding her daughter apparently unprepared for this unusual demonstration, she quietly patted her head instead, saying, 'Good girl, you have acted as I knew you would, and very much lightened your mother's heart.'

'Shall we go to this party ?' asked Audrey, not looking up.

'Of course, my dear. I shall call upon Mrs Winterton to-day.'

Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. Oh, how the days dragged ; how long the hours seemed ; how wearily they passed ! And yet when Thursday came, Audrey would fain have had them all to go through again, so nervous and anxious did she feel. She had no hope ; only the certainty of future bitterness, and fruitless longing, seemed to stare her in the face. Still suspense was unendurable, and she knew herself well enough to be assured that nothing could try her so severely.

‘Marshall, do make me look my best to-day,’ she said.

‘Why, Miss Audrey, you don’t want my help. I never saw you looking better. Your eyes are as bright as when you were a little girl, and you’ve got quite a colour. I’m sure it’s a treat to hear you speak in your old way again, for you have not cared what you looked like lately.’

So that afternoon, notwithstanding there were girls there in the first bloom of their youth, fresh as the flowers they sat among,—beauties whose conquests and triumphs were only beginning,—none of them attracted more attention than did Audrey Verschoyle, with her well-dressed elegant figure, her intellectual face, and her thorough-bred, unconscious, self-possessed manner. As she entered the room all eyes were turned towards her, and among others those of a man who felt his heart give quick heavy beats, and his vision become dimmed until all was blotted out, except that face blanched white and up-turned to his ; a man who strained his ears to catch the sound of a voice which haunted him day and night, and yet who strove to command himself sufficiently to bend his head towards his companion and answer,—

‘Yes, unusually cold for this time of year.’

‘Warm, I said,’ laughed the lady with whom he was conversing.

‘Yes, I meant warm,’ answered Mr Dynecourt.

In another moment he had touched Audrey’s hand, had expressed to Lady Laura his pleasure at seeing her looking so well, and his regret at hearing that her daughter had been an invalid, and made several other polite commonplace speeches. But not once had he turned his

eyes upon Audrey, or addressed her in any way. As they moved on he looked at her, thinking—‘Her face looks as if it were chiselled out of marble—like her heart.’ And yet he could have flung himself at her feet and implored her to cheat him again. He longed for one of the old loving looks, and wished he could again feel the soft pressure of her hand, and hear the low-toned whispers that had lured him to misery, even were he then to be cast away, a prey to bitterness and despair.

And poor Audrey, how did it fare with her? She seemed suddenly benumbed; she was surprised she did not feel more. At home she had pictured their meeting, and how she would strive to look unconscious, and restrain the tears that would be ready to flow freely if he were cold and distant, as she feared he might be. Now all her fears were realized. He had, as much as he could without attracting notice, utterly ignored her, and yet she did not seem to care—did not seem to care for anything that might happen to herself, or to anybody.

Miss Bingham and Mrs Winterton wondered why Mr Ford did not come. Lady Laura, too, was surprised, although she did not worry herself much, being satisfied that her daughter had got over her fit of refusing him, and was now quite ready to be Mrs Richard Ford when asked. Her ladyship thought this happy result entirely owing to her own diplomacy, and prided herself greatly on her skill in leaving Audrey at home, moping by herself. She considered this to be the final touch which had brought about the desired end. So she lent a ready ear to a story told by Mr Marjoribanks, of how he had been

fascinated in days gone by with a portrait of herself in the 'Book of Beauty,' and that by it he should have recognized her anywhere. In recounting her past triumphs, and the homage which had been paid to a beauty of which, she said, she might now safely speak without being accused of vanity, her daughter was forgotten.

Audrey was sitting for a few minutes alone, having asked Colonel Grant, with whom she had been talking, to get her some tea. Lifting her eyes suddenly, she met a look of passionate longing, that made every nerve tingle, and in an instant, without pausing to consider, she made a sign to Geoffrey Dynecourt to join her. He came to her at once, but with such sternness in his face that Audrey could hardly steady her voice to say, 'I—I wanted to speak to you; could you find some place where we should not be overheard?'

Just then Colonel Grant returned with the tea, making many excuses for being delayed; and Mr Dynecourt said, 'I will look for the plant I was speaking of, Miss Verschoyle, and then perhaps you will permit me to show it to you.'

He left her, and did not return until many of the company were moving about, looking at the ferns and rare plants, so that their being together was not likely to attract notice. 'Near to this,' he said, 'there is a small room thrown open to the guests; no one was in it a few minutes since, and we are less likely to be interrupted there than anywhere else.'

Audrey bowed her head; to speak seemed impossible.

A short glass-covered passage led to the room, the door of which Mr Dynecourt opened, but immediately closed, finding it already occupied by a lady and gentleman engaged in conversation. He hesitated a moment, and then said, 'You must take a turn with me in the garden. You have your bonnet and cloak on, it will not harm you ;' and before Audrey had time to question the propriety of this course she was walking by Geoffrey Dynecourt's side, and feeling that she would have given the whole world to have been anywhere else. Why had she brought him there ? She had nothing to say, her strength seemed to be forsaking her, and she was overcome with shame at the thought that she was forcing her love upon him, and that he saw it. This nerved her to make a great effort and say, 'Mr Dynecourt, perhaps you may think me strangely inconsistent in wanting to speak to you alone. But Mr Ford told me that you were thinking of going abroad for many years, and I—I could not bear that you should have a bad opinion of me all your life.'

'A bad opinion,' he said ; 'who told you that I had a bad opinion of you ?'

'No one told me so in words ; but the message you asked Mr Ford to give me was no arrow shot at random. You knew it would wound where it was aimed.'

'Pardon me, Miss Verschoyle, if I say I had no idea that you *could* be wounded.'

Audrey did not answer ; but turned with defiant eyes and looked straight at him as she said—

'Mr Dynecourt, you are very hard upon me ; but perhaps it is best, for your pity would be unbearable, and for

a moment I feared that I might have incurred it. I see now that I was wrong to intrude myself upon you, and take you from pleasant society to listen to the woman who has taught you to show a want of courtesy to her sex. I came, in the weakness of my nature, to ask you to forgive the pain I have caused you, and not to think, because I seemed to you false and hard-hearted, that truth and love had ceased to exist among us. I hope there is yet much happiness in store for you.'

'Oh yes,' he said, 'I am certain of happiness. Exiled from my country, a homeless man without hope, without a creature to care for me, I cannot but be happy. If at any time a gloomy moment should come, I have but to recall the picture of my old home, the smell of whose very earth is dear to me. I have only to remember that it is in the hands of strangers ; that the people who loved me and served me, as their fathers did my fathers, are serving other masters ; and that the woman I would have died for is mistress of Dyne Court, rejoicing in the lovely face which lured a weak fool to his destruction, and the arts which caught the old man who could give her the only thing her soul longed for—money, fine clothes, and jewels.'

'It is false,' she said ; 'I shall never be the wife of Richard Ford !'

'You tell me so, when not an hour since I heard your mother receiving congratulations on your approaching marriage ? How am I to believe you ?'

'Because I tell you.'

'You tell me what ?'

‘That ~~he~~ has already asked me, and I have refused to marry him.’

Geoffrey Dynecourt staggered and turned pale as death.

‘And, sir,’ she continued haughtily, ‘now that I have added to my other sins in showing you how easily I can betray a confidence which noble-minded women consider sacred, it is time we parted;’ and she turned to leave him.

But Mr Dynecourt grasped her arm, and drawing her towards him said, in a voice choked with emotion,—

‘Audrey, for the sake of God who sees both our hearts, don’t let us part like this. Have mercy upon me. Show me some pity, or I shall go mad. Have you nothing, nothing more to say to me?’

She lifted up her face, white to the lips, and looking for an instant into the eager, passionate eyes whose gaze seemed intense enough to read her thoughts, answered slowly,

‘Yes—that—I—love—you with all my heart!’ and then cold, undemonstrative Audrey threw her arms round this man’s neck, and her tears rained upon his breast. He did not attempt to hush her, or to still her sobs, he only held her as if defying the whole world to tear her from him.

‘Audrey,’ he whispered hoarsely, ‘you are not deceiving yourself and me? It is love, not pity, that you are giving me?’

The tightening of her arms was her only answer.

‘You know I am poor, and that I never expect to be otherwise; that I can give you nothing but the neces-

saries of life ; that I ask you to share cares, anxieties, and perhaps troubles of which you have known nothing hitherto. What do you say ?

She no longer hid her face, but looking at him answered, ' That if you will take me, I will be your wife ; ' and in the kiss that sealed this bond ' their hearts leaped to their lips,' and vowed a constancy that death alone could sever. . . .

Have they been hours together, or has time stood still, that the light looks only a shade dimmer than it did when they entered this garden of paradise ? Around nothing is changed, all is the very same except the two who are walking towards the house. Can this soft April expression, and these liquid, loving eyes belong to the cold, haughty-looking woman whose face seemed chiselled out of marble ? Is it possible that Geoffrey Dynecourt has ever looked stern and relentless, with hard lines about a mouth where now you could almost see dimples ?

' And you are sure you never really ceased to love me ? '

' Never ; I used to hate myself, because I could not help loving you so madly.'

' And I have lain and cried myself to sleep, thinking of our bitter parting, and that you had forgotten me.'

' Oh, Audrey, how could I, how could any man who had ever loved you, cease to love you ? My darling, night after night I have watched your window, and as I passed the house I have rested my hand against the wall.

because inside was the treasure whose image filled my heart.'

'We have both suffered !' she said.

'We have indeed, dearest, but how small it seems to the joy that I feel now ! Oh ! Audrey, I could ask you every moment if you love me, for the ecstasy of hearing you say you do.'

'And I could listen to the question for ever, so sweet is it to know that you want my love.'

'We must go in,' he said ; 'I dare not keep you out longer, and yet to meet other people now seems more than I can bear.'

'We only part until to-morrow, and my thoughts will not leave you for one moment ;' then with her old gaiety she added, 'Now let us gather up all our energies to meet the attack with boldness ; for it fails me to think where the people imagine we can be.'

CHAPTER XXXIV.

‘WHAT CAN HE WANT?’



UDREY and Geoffrey Dynecourt carried off the exclamations of surprise at their absence in a very clever manner, aided greatly by Lady Laura's perfect tranquillity regarding their movements. She said she certainly ought to scold Mr Dynecourt for permitting Audrey to act so foolishly, although, as she remarked to those near her, ‘I quite expected her to be missing, for Audrey can't stand the heat of a room, or of any covered place when she has her bonnet on. I remember Lady Alfreton taking her to an affair of this kind, and she went roaming about the grounds, and was absolutely lost.’ She did not mention that this was in the height of summer, when most of the people there did the same. In her heart, Lady Laura was very much annoyed at her daughter's conduct, but she was too wise to give others a handle against her by betraying the slightest vexation.

'It's absurd,' thought she, 'for Audrey to be setting everybody at defiance ; and Mr Ford would not probably like to hear that she was so entirely engrossed with another in his absence. I shall speak to her as soon as we are alone.'

Very soon after this she was expressing to Mr Marjoribanks how much she had enjoyed his pleasant gathering. Then, leaning on her host's arm, she left, distributing smiles, adieux, and farewell compliments, causing a perfect chorus of, 'What a charming woman !' to follow her departure.

Mr Dynecourt escorted Audrey to the carriage. Just before it drove off, he asked Lady Laura if she would be disengaged at two o'clock the next day, as he wished her to give him a few minutes' conversation.

'Certainly ; I shall be very pleased to see you,' she said, with her most fascinating smile. Waiting for a moment, she turned suddenly to her daughter, and said, 'What can he want ? I have not been speaking about him to anybody, have I ?'

Audrey was glad that her face could not be seen. Left with her mother, she did not know what to do. Tell her she must ; she could never let this thunderbolt be launched by Geoffrey first. She knew a storm would be sure to follow, and thought it best to allow some of the violence to be spent before he came. Yet how to begin, or what to say or do, she could not tell. To have contemplated a marriage with a poor man at any time would have been a dreadful crime ; now, when a rich suitor was at her feet, the offence would be a thousand times greater.

'I wonder what could have prevented Mr Ford from coming?' continued Lady Laura; 'I dare say you will have a letter from him to-night. I hope he is not ill.'

'I hope not,' returned her daughter.

'And, Audrey, I must say that I think you acted very unwisely to-day in permitting Mr Dynecourt to pay you so much attention.'

'Did he pay me much attention, mamma?'

'Well, you know what I mean. I suppose if it had not been for the sake of getting up some stupid sort of flirtation with him, you would not have gone roaming into the garden, or to some distant greenhouse, or wherever you did go. I made the best of it, but I assure you I was not pleased; and, let me tell you, nobody can afford to set people's tongues at naught before marriage.'

'Can they afterwards? because if so, I shall get married as soon as possible.'

'Well, of course, when a woman has a husband, and a good house, and her position is established, people are very lenient to her peculiarities. If you choose to make a friend of one person *then*, do so; though, remember, it's rather a task to turn a bear into a domestic animal,' and Lady Laura laughed at her own sharpness.

'I don't quite understand the allusion,' said Audrey.

'Don't you, dear?' replied Lady Laura, playfully. 'Well, you know I always look upon Mr Dynecourt as having something of the savage about him, and one never knows when the nature of such people will peep out.'

'I am sorry you do not like him,' replied her daughter.

'Oh! I like him well enough; and if he is to be a

favourite of yours, my dear child, rest assured I shall never interfere with you.'

'Then is securing my regard the same as securing yours, mamma ?'

'Of course it will be, love.'

'But is it now ?'

'Yes, decidedly.'

'Then in that case, I need not hesitate to tell you why Mr Dynecourt is coming to see you to-morrow,' said Audrey. Her heart beat very fast, and she felt desperately nervous ; but it was of no use waiting ; she had better have it over—'and that is because he wants your consent to marry me.'

Lady Laura paused for a moment to take in the words fully, then she laughed, 'Marry you ! well, that is a good joke. Has he never heard about Mr Ford ?'

'Yes.'

'Then, my dear, you are carrying the thing a great deal too far. I had no idea that there was any flirtation going on between you ; but I think you might have spared me the trouble of answering him. If you do not want to make an enemy of the man, you need not have said you did not care for him. You could have given him to understand that you had already accepted Mr Ford.'

'But I have not accepted Mr Ford.'

'Well, perhaps not in words, but you mean to marry him.'

'No, I do not.'

'Not intend to marry Mr Ford ?'

'No, mamma ; and I may as well tell you all, at once.

Mr Ford has proposed to me, and I have refused him ; and Mr Dynecourt has asked me to marry him, and I have accepted him.'

'Audrey !' almost screamed Lady Laura, 'you're mad ; I'm positive you are, you wicked ! bad ! abandoned girl ! you must be. I don't believe it's true, you're only saying this to worry and annoy me, and I can't stand it ; your conduct already has so upset my nerves that I feel as if the slightest strain would make me break down altogether.'

'Mamma, I am very sorry. I know I told you very abruptly, but it is better that you should know the truth.'

'Do you mean to tell me, then, that what you have just said is true, and that you really intend to act in this way ?' asked Lady Laura, speaking very slowly.

'Yes, mamma.'

'Then you never shall !' exclaimed her mother. 'I'd rather put you into a lunatic asylum than allow you to marry that penniless, senseless beggar. Never, Audrey, never shall you marry that man.'

'Of course, I am prepared for your being very angry, and very disappointed, mamma. I have no doubt were I in your place I should be the same. Perhaps just now it is useless for me to say how sorry I am to grieve you, still I *am* truly sorry ; but don't say I shall never marry Mr Dynecourt. Listen to reason, mamma.'

'I will listen to nothing ; and you had better write and tell him not to dare to come near me, or I'll have him put out of the house—the impertinent, presuming, red-headed fellow.'

The latter epithet was too much for Audrey's gravity ;

the absurdity of such a reflection being cast upon Geoffrey's tawny locks turned her anger at once, and she said, in a softened voice,—

‘I know, mamma, my choice must appear to you to be unaccountable ; but when I tell you I love this man well enough, I believe, to beg my very bread with him, surely, with such a feeling in my heart, you will not counsel me to marry Mr Ford.’

‘You ought to marry Mr Ford, and have no feeling in your heart.’

‘Quite so ; and as long as I had no feeling I was willing to become his wife—but now I would rather jump into the river than do so.’

‘And I would rather see you lying there than disgraced. Oh, what have I done, that my children should treat me so shamefully ! But as you have no thought for me, I will have none for you, and I'll tell every one that you are mad, and your new lover shall have a nice account of your former conduct. I'll tell him how you have deceived and cajoled others,— that your love for him is only a pretence ; that you have no heart, and never had one.’

‘All that will fall on deaf ears, mamma ; he knows my best and my worst, and, thank God, he is content to take me as I am. But understand, mamma, although I wish to give you all the obedience and respect that you are entitled to, yet I intend to marry Geoffrey Dynecourt ; therefore I trust you will not force me to do anything which might give rise to scandal. I am content to wait your time, to take your advice, to follow out any plan you

may think best, but I intend to marry Geoffrey Dynecourt ; and I also intend the world to know it.'

'Oh yes, publish your disgrace as soon as possible.'

'Do not speak in that way, mother, for love has so softened me that I long to throw my arms round you, and sob out my happiness ;' and she hid her face in her hands, and cried bitterly.

'If you had made a proper choice I should have been very pleased to have received any proof of your affection. But when I remember how you have deceived me, by never saying one word of this, and leading me to suppose that you would marry Mr Ford, I can put little faith in either your love or your tears. What I can possibly say to that man I know not. I fully expect he'll threaten us with an action, and I cannot blame him if he does.'

'You need not fear Mr Ford troubling you ; he was far kinder to me than you have been, mamma.'

'Very glad to get quit of his bargain,' sneered her ladyship ; 'and I am sure no one need wonder at it. You seem to think that you are somebody, to encourage and lead people on, and then refuse them ; but I can tell you the world won't be so ready to believe your story. Common sense will tell people that, unless you are mad—as I believe you are—it is not very probable that a *passée* woman of thirty, without good looks or accomplishments—for I don't know what you can do—would refuse a man whose only folly is, that with such a fortune as his he has not aimed higher. Lady Inverlochy would have jumped at him for one of her girls ; and as for the Grahams, they were after him like a pack of hounds.'

'Well, mamma,' said Audrey, smiling, 'now they can try their chance. I will promise not to interfere with any one, if they will only let me alone.'

'Oh yes! just like your selfish nature,' exclaimed her mother. 'As long as your wishes are gratified you never consider other people. It will be very pleasant for me to hear the sneers and inuendoes of women whose daughters have made excellent matches. I know their way of supposing it is a love-match, and adding, "What else could it be for?"' A polite reminder that they are quite aware of the poverty of the whole affair. 'What your brother will say, I do not know.'

'Say! What can he say? I am sure he did all he could to put me against Mr Ford.'

'That is only because men always underrate what they consider secure. You'll find he will not be so delighted to have a brother-in-law whose present position I consider to be only one step above that of a tradesman.'

Audrey laughed outright. 'Well, mamma, that is just what I want you to see—that, after all, Geoffrey is in advance of Mr Ford.'

Lady Laura shrugged her shoulders, saying, if they had come to quibbling about words, it was time to put a stop to the conversation. She sat silent for the few minutes before they reached home, stepped out of the carriage, and betook herself to her own room, from which she did not emerge during the rest of the evening.

Audrey sat considering how she could best soften her

mother's wrathful indignation, and keep her rather sharp tongue in check, during the interview which she so much dreaded for Geoffrey Dynecourt. His poverty, she feared, would be rather a sore subject with him when made the target for all the arrows with which her mother intended to pierce him. If Charles were only at hand, she thought he might make matters smoother for her. So, after thinking over it, she wrote and asked him to help her. Lady Laura was similarly employed ; so the same post conveyed two letters to Captain Verschoyle, both of them begging him to return home at once. Audrey's said—

‘ DEAREST CHARLIE,—For the sake of old days, give me your help. Something has happened which has made mamma very angry, and she will not listen to me, or to sense or reason. To you she would probably pay more attention ; will you therefore come home as soon as you can, and try to set matters straight between us ?

‘ Ever your loving sister,

‘ AUDREY.

‘ P.S.—I cannot explain anything in a letter ; but I am so happy, and I am longing to hear some one say they are glad to hear it.’

Lady Laura wrote :—

‘ MY DEAR CHARLES,—Audrey has gone mad ; quite mad, I believe. I can give you no explanation of her conduct in a letter. As I trust it may still be hushed up.

I do not like to say a word on paper ; but I must see you. So make any excuse you like to Mr Egerton, and return at once to

‘ Your affectionate, but really distracted mother,
‘ LAURA VERSCHOYLE.’

CHAPTER XXXV.

RED-COAT ASSURANCE.



BIGAIL FLETCHER, Patience Fox's only sister, was a tiny, fragile, dark-eyed little woman, with a stout will and opinion of her own, a quick vivacious temperament, and a general interest in the affairs of all her friends and acquaintances. Most people in and about York knew the Fletchers. Therefore when Dorothy told Mr Egerton she was going to visit her aunt, he made greater friends with her, telling her he remembered her mother well, and adding, 'Though I have not a shake-hands acquaintance with your aunt, *we* know each other.'

To Captain Verschoyle the old gentleman was not disposed to be quite so amiable, and to Dorothy's horror Charles received two or three decided snubs. When they reached the station Miss Fletcher was waiting for Dorothy. Mr Egerton jumped out and told her that he had been intrusted by Mr Crewdson with the care of her niece, and

he had much pleasure in finding that York could claim an interest in the young lady, 'for her face does as much credit to it as her mother's did before her.'

This led to a conversation about Patience and old days, during which Dorothy and Captain Verschoyle found time to say a few words to each other and to arrange a meeting.

'But you must introduce me to your aunt,' said Charles.

'Oh yes,' said Dorothy, feeling very nervous about performing this ceremony. A pause occurred, and she began, 'Aunt Abigail, this is Charles Verschoyle. Mother knows him,' she added timidly.

'That's right, Miss Fox, back him up with a good reverence; I am sure his appearance requires it,' said Mr Egerton.

Fortunately Aunt Abigail knew the eccentric character of Mr Egerton, so without replying to this comment she held out her hand to Captain Verschoyle, made a few remarks to him, and, asking Dorothy if she were quite ready, entered the fly which was waiting for them.

The two gentlemen watched the fly till it was out of sight, and Mr Egerton, taking his god-son's arm, walked on for a few minutes in silence, and then said—

'When I unearthed you twice near Miss Fletcher's, why couldn't you have told me what took you in that direction? What need was there for trumping up a story about Hartop? I suppose you aren't ashamed of knowing the girl, are you?'

'Ashamed!' said Captain Verschoyle, showing through his bronzed skin the colour which the question brought to his cheeks; 'I don't quite understand you'

'Oh, that *is* a pity!' replied Mr Egerton, with a sneer. 'You're so uncommonly sharp generally, particularly in deceiving other people when you have a game of your own on hand. Ha, ha!' he suddenly roared. 'I can't help laughing when I think of your face; I never saw a fellow so chop-fallen in my life. So you thought I didn't know you were going to Leeds?'

'I really did not think or care about it. Miss Fox's sister has shown me a great deal of kindness, and knowing that I should probably see her in town, I thought it would only be civil to call and inquire for the young lady.'

'You're your father's own son, Charlie,' said the old gentleman. 'You've a precious awkward way of telling a lie. Now your mother does it handsomely; but then it's a woman's trade. How did you come to know this girl? Who is she? What's her father?'

Captain Verschoyle tried to cover his vexation by pretending to be amused. 'Upon my word, sir, one would imagine that you thought I had some serious design upon the young lady, whom I know because she is the sister of Mrs Hanbury, of Fryston Grange.'

'Well, then, who is the father of Mrs Hanbury of Fryston Grange? and who's Hanbury? You don't think I forget your ways of asking everybody's pedigree, that after eating their dinners and drinking their wines you may turn up your aristocratic nose at them and their belongings. I know you're beating about the bush, Charlie, so you may as well tell me whether he's a tallow-chandler, or a cheesemonger; for, fortunately for us, card-playing, racing, betting, or most other ways of getting money under

false pretences, are not popular professions among the middle classes yet.'

Captain Verschoyle saw that he had better answer in a straightforward manner, so he said,—

‘Mrs Hanbury’s husband is a corn-merchant in London, and her father is a cloth-dealer in the West of England.’

‘West of England ! What do you mean by the West of England ?’

‘Why, Plymouth.’

‘Why don’t you say Plymouth, then ? . That’s where you were sick so long after landing in England. Oh, so you made the acquaintance there.’

‘Really, sir, you are making a great deal out of nothing,’ said Captain Verschoyle, losing his temper. ‘Out of mere courtesy I call upon a young lady, to ask if she has any commissions for her sister, and you twist it about and question me, as if you thought I were going to propose to her immediately.’

‘No ; I’ve not got that thought in my head, Charlie. But I have this one : you have a good many philandering ways about you which a girl like that doesn’t understand. The young fellows she has been accustomed to haven’t been blessed with your red-coat assurance, so they don’t take it for granted that *anything* becomes them. Why, she’s a baby compared to the women you’re accustomed to. Her blushing smiles and tears come as quickly as sunshine and cloud on an April morning.’

‘You’re speaking plainly, sir.’

‘Yes, I generally do, particularly to you, my boy ; but

I never yet left you in a scrape if I could get you out.'

'That you never did,' replied Captain Verschoyle, his anger vanishing as he remembered the many substantial acts of kindness he had received from his god-father. 'Now, tell me what's all this about, and what do you mean?'

'Why this—that that girl has caught your fancy, and you want her to be equally taken with you. Well, you've no intention of marrying her, and some fine day the time for parting comes. Until you are out of her sight, of course, you are heart-broken ; but after that you are soothed by a cigar, or a new friend ; while she frets and pines after you, smiles and rejects an honest man who would have tried to make her happy, and finally becomes a discontented wife, or a soured old maid.'

'In this case, although all you say were true, I could not marry the young lady. Quakers don't permit their daughters to marry soldiers, I believe. I remember hearing Miss Fox say, that nothing would induce her to disobey her parents in such a matter.'

Mr Egerton looked at his companion sharply from under his shaggy eyebrows ; but Captain Verschoyle avoided the scrutiny, and calling his attention to some other matter, the subject for the time dropped.

At Darington Captain Verschoyle found the letters from Audrey and his mother, and as he dressed for dinner he speculated sometimes on what could be wrong with his sister ; but more frequently on what he should do about Dorothy. 'Entreat her to marry me if I stay here, I know ; for after parting with her I found myself thinking how I

could best manage it, and it was wonderful how my hopes of military glory faded before the rosy sun which illumined "Love in a cottage." I wish I had never seen the child. The idea of sacrificing a sweet pretty creature like her to that prim-faced Crewdson! a fellow with no more sense than he was born with—nothing of the man about him—a fine specimen of a lover, in truth! What can some parents be thinking of? *They* don't care who their children marry so long as they get rid of them; and I suspect old Fox is one of that kind. Perhaps Crewdson has money—I shouldn't wonder—it generally falls to the lot of wooden-headed mummies to get all they want. Now if I had a decent income I'd snap my fingers at the world, and marry who I please; as it is, I don't know what to do. I don't see that I am to blame now, because I *have* offered to give up everything for her, and she won't have me. She says that her father wouldn't give his consent, and that she would not ask him. I can't do more than that, and, as Egerton says, it's no use making the child discontented. I believe I shall feel the breaking off more than she will: but it is for her sake much more than my own—she says we could not be happy; and then Captain Verschoyle discontentedly flung his boots to the other end of the room, and himself into a chair, exclaiming, 'I'm a terribly unlucky fellow in love affairs. Whenever hearts are trumps I'm safe to hold a bad hand.'

While Captain Verschoyle indulged in these reflections, Dorothy was engaged in the difficult task of telling Aunt Abigail that she no longer thought of marrying Josiah Crewdson. She feared her father would be disappointed,

but she found it impossible. Aunt Abigail was not in any way surprised, as notwithstanding all Josiah's good qualities, his appearance and manners were decidedly against him. In vain, however, did she try to discover any new lover who had driven the old one from her niece's mind. Dorothy kept guard over her lips, and not until she was alone did she permit herself to review the event of the day. The sweetest words echoed in her memory were those of Charles Verschoyle when he said that he would give up anything for her sake—even his profession; and that he would try and be a Friend. Oh! if he would do that, her father could not say no; it would not be right of him to refuse without a just cause. And thinking over all he had told her she tried to stifle her conscience, and to reconcile with her principles what she had done. She was not quite easy about Kezia Crewdson, and shuddered to think of her having seen them. 'I will tell father that I did not act rightly,' she thought, 'and how sorry I was after. I do not deserve the happiness which I trust is yet in store for me.'

The following morning Dorothy tried to persuade herself that she was really very tired, and unable to accompany her aunt during her usual walk. Nevertheless, as she sat alone, she started up and listened nervously to every ring of the bell, as if expecting a visitor, until Jane announced Captain Verschoyle. He had brought Miss Fletcher some flowers, he said, and wanted to know if Dorothy had any message for her sister, as he was unexpectedly recalled to London. All this was told while Jane was in the room; but as soon as she had left it

Captain Verschoyle seated himself nearer to Dorothy, saying, 'It is so annoying, just when I wanted to stay with you ; but I shall only be gone a few days, and you will, of course, be here when I return ?'

'I don't know—perhaps so,' she answered, trying not to betray her anguish at hearing him speak of going away.

Now in this Captain Verschoyle was acting contrary to his nature, which was sincere and honourable of its kind ; but his bringing up could not be thrown aside in a day. Although love was undermining the fabric of selfishness and pride which contact with the world had built up within him, every now and then his training rebelled, and his temper suffered. This made him say somewhat sharply, 'Really you seem indifferent on the subject. I fancied it might be of some slight importance to you.'

'Charles, what dost thou mean ?' she said, looking at him surprised and sorrowful.

'Why,' he answered, working himself into a heat, and glad to find some one on whom to fling a portion of the accusing burden which tormented him, 'I mean that it is very hard upon a man, after having given all his love, to find that he has no influence. Of course I should not ask you to disobey your father, when doing so would make you miserable, but I hardly expected to find that you had determined to give up nothing for me.'

'But thou saidst, that for me thou wouldest give up being a soldier.'

'Yes, that is it ; *I* am to give up everything for *you*, but you give up nothing in return. My profession, in spite of all you may have been taught to the contrary, is an hon-

ourable one ; and so dear to me that no woman who truly loved me would desire me to make such a sacrifice for her sake.'

Dorothy did not turn her white face towards him, as she said, 'Then thou didst not mean what thou saidst yesterday ?'

'Of course I meant it, and mean it still, if you insist.

'No ; I have no thought of insisting. We will forget yesterday, and will do what I always knew to be right. Thou and I are different in every way. It was no fault of thine that I loved thee. I could not help it ; but I should have striven against it, and then all this would not have happened.'

By this time Captain Verschoyle was not only enraged with himself, but also with Dorothy. He had come there with the intention of announcing his departure, and had pictured Dorothy's distress at hearing of it. He had said to himself, that while he was trying to soothe and comfort her, perhaps it would be best to strive with gentle tenderness to show her how impossible it was for him to give up his profession, and if she were certain that her father would not give his consent to their marriage, why, it would be useless to ask it. Though it broke both their hearts, he supposed they must part, and once apart, it would be easier for each to forget.

Dorothy, by making the proposal herself, without waiting for all those caresses which were to dull the pain of separation, had overthrown this plan, to Captain Verschoyle's great annoyance. He said all the reproachful things he could to her, and while she sat listening, still

and motionless, he had a desire to shake her as he wwould do a refractory child. Finally, saying that they were evidently in no mood for companionship, he took up his hat, and wishing her 'good morning,' dashed out of the room. And then, with the inconsistency of a lover, he waited to see if she would not come after him, imploring the forgiveness he was longing now to give her. His heart smote him sharply as he thought that perhaps the dear little thing was crying. What a horrid temper he had ! He would go back and tell her he never meant her to believe one word that he had said. And it would be so delicious to know that she could not part in that way ; and to hear her asking to be forgiven. He was tempted to try. He would open the outer door, and if that did not bring her to him he would go back immediately. So, putting this thought into execution, he with some unnecessary clatter opened the house door, and then gave vent to an exclamation of surprise, for on the step stood Josiah Crewdson.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SECRET UNEASINESS.



N the Thursday following that on which Dorothy had left Fryston Grange, Nathaniel Fox walked to King's-heart in a state of great mental excitement and perturbation.

Patience was sitting in the little morning room when her husband entered, and one glance at his face told her that something of importance had gone wrong. He looked round, and thinking they might be overheard by the gardener, who was working near the window, and by Lydia, who was engaged in the dining-room, he said,—

‘Patience, I desire to speak to thee. Come up-stairs.’

She obeyed, following Nathaniel into their own room, the door of which he shut. Then, turning round so as to face his wife, he demanded,—

‘Haven’t I heard thee speak of Charles Verschoyle—who is this young man?’

‘He is the person who fainted once in the shop at Plymouth. He afterwards came here to thank me, or rather Judith, whom he took for me, for my kind attention to him. When Dorothy and I went to London we met him accidentally at the railway station. As I told thee, he took care of us till Grace arrived. She, thinking he was a friend of ours, invited him to dinner, and at Fryston we met again. Why dost thou ask?’

Nathaniel took no notice of his wife’s question, but walked up and down in deep meditation, while she sat waiting for the reply which she knew would come. At last, stopping before her, he said,—

‘Something has occurred to-day which never happened in our family before, Patience. I have been taken to task, rebuked, and admonished concerning my conduct and the conduct of my daughter.’

‘Nathaniel!’ exclaimed Patience. ‘For what reason?’

‘Joshua Prideaux came to me to-day, and asked to have some private talk with me. He then showed me a letter from John Millar of Leeds, stating that it was with much pain and surprise that he informed him that I, Nathaniel Fox, had dealt in an underhand and unfriendly way with Josiah Crewdson. Because that while I was allowing him to suppose that my daughter would one day become his wife, I had already given my consent to her marrying Charles Verschoyle, a man who is a soldier. Now, Patience, hast thou heard anything of this? What does it mean?’ And Nathaniel’s stern face seemed to darken with the inward resentment which such a scandal aroused.

'I am as much amazed as thou art, dear. Who can have made such an imputation upon us?'

'That is the extraordinary part. Josiah Crewdson told his sisters so in justification of Dorothy's unwarrantable behaviour to this man, while she was staying at Holberton.'

'Nathaniel!' said Patience, 'doth not this show thee the falsehood of the whole thing? Our Dorothy behave in an unseemly manner, and Josiah Crewdson obliged to screen her!' And Patience smiled in her incredulity and staunch belief in her child's rectitude.

'Of course,' he replied, 'I know something is false. Why, Patience, if I thought that in one month my child could forget her training, principles, and obedience to us I'd—'

But Patience caught him by the arm.

'Hush, dear,' she said; 'parents with as little expectation of a trial as we ourselves, have had one. I believe *nothing* against Dorothy. But if the time ever came when we must, we would, I know, try to follow the example of a Father who is ever tender towards erring children.'

But Nathaniel seemed not to hear. He shook her hand off, and continued his moody walk.

'I shall write to Josiah and to Grace,' he said; 'and thou hadst better tell thy sister Abigail that Dorothy must come home at once. If such reports as these are being circulated, it is better that she were under our own eyes. Oh, why did we let her go there, Patience? The girl was happy and contented, and would have continued so until a worthy man took her for his wife. I was overruled, but I doubted my judgment. I knew that the

world, with its snares and pitfalls, was no place for an innocent girl.'

'Thy theory is wrong, as I often tell thee,' said Patience, hoping to divert his mind by argument. 'Thou art ever confounding ignorance and innocence, either of which may exist without the other. If I have any fear for Dorothy, it is because she has never been shown many things which might serve to guard her against herself.'

Nathaniel shook his head.

'What sort of a person is this young man Verschoyle?'

'He is not a very young man. He looks older than he is, perhaps, by being bronzed with the sun. He has a very winning, kindly manner, and I think I might say he would do nothing dishonourable.'

'Dishonourable!' echoed Nathaniel, contemptuously; 'that, probably, means that he may be godless, immoral, and unprincipled, so long as he does not break rules set up by libertines like himself.'

'Thou art judging with undue harshness, Nathaniel. I know nothing of Charles Verschoyle beyond exchanging the passing civilities of every-day life with him. But it would not be fair to receive civilities from all denominations, and yet believe that good motives could only dwell in members of our own Society.'

But Nathaniel was too thoroughly annoyed to listen calmly to anything like reason from his wife. He could not bear to think that a man like Joshua Prideaux should have it in his power to administer a rebuke to him, and take him to task as he had done, for permitting his daughter to be the engaged wife of a soldier. He permit

such a thing ! when he had invariably used every effort to support all Peace movements and to discourage war ! And this the Society both at Leeds and Plymouth well knew. So he wrote to Josiah Crewdson, demanding information respecting all that he had been charged with. He also wrote to Grace, desiring to know what intimacy existed between Dorothy and Charles Verschoyle, and whether she knew where the young man then was.

Patience wrote a long and guarded letter to Dorothy, telling her that she had better return home at once, and another letter to her sister Abigail, informing her a little more fully of her secret uneasiness.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE QUAKER'S QUIXOTIC LOVE.



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York. His
visit to
Dorothy,
there-
fore, only
proceeded
from Josiah's
own fears,
rather than
from any
knowledge
of what
was taking
place.

When Captain Verschoyle so unexpectedly opened Abigail Fletcher's door, Josiah fancied the whole matter was settled. He wondered at seeing Dorothy run upstairs without paying any attention to either of them. He said he hoped Captain Verschoyle was well, and informed him that they were having seasonable weather. His nervous loquacity being stopped by Captain Verschoyle asking him somewhat sharply if he were 'going in,' Josiah jumped on one side.

'Oh, thanks,' said Captain Verschoyle, impatiently, 'because I am going out. Good morning.' And the

gallant officer walked away, anathematizing Quakers generally, and 'that fool Crewdson' in particular.

Josiah lingered about, and finally went into the room which Dorothy had vacated, and waited for her to come down-stairs. His mind was filled with sickening anxiety lest Aunt Abigail should return—Captain Verschoyle, hoping that Josiah might take the hint, having said she was out. Once or twice he got up to ring the bell, but sat down again. At length, when he had quite made up his mind that he would send word that he was there and could not stay long, Dorothy appeared, saying that she feared she had exhausted his patience, but Josiah declared she had not in the least done so. Then they indulged in a little irrelevant conversation, until Josiah, feeling that he could no longer delay what he had come purposely to announce, suddenly got up, looked out of the window, and then returned to his place to say,—

‘Oh, Dorothy! I suppose thou hast altered thy mind?’

‘How?’ For Dorothy was in no talking mood. She was in the dull state of grief when everything is heard and done with an effort, inducing one to sit still, silent and stunned.

• ‘I mean that I met Charles Verschoyle at the door, so I thought that perhaps— Oh, Dorothy, do not mind telling me. Thou hast changed thy mind and wilt marry him—is it not so?’

‘No.’

‘But he has written to thy father. Thou wilt tell him of it?’

Dorothy shook her head.

Poor Josiah ! he wondered what he should do. How could he inform her that Kezia had told him of the scene which she had witnessed in the drawing-room ? More than that, how could he tell her that his sisters had made it their business to spread among Friends the report of Dorothy Fox's engagement to a soldier, while they and their brother regarded her as his future wife. Nathaniel would be certain to tax her with it, and was it not better that she should be in some way prepared ?

'Dorothy,' he began again—and he drew an imaginary pattern on the carpet with his foot, that she might be quite certain he was not looking at her—'Kezia, it seems, looked at thee through the window.'

Dorothy uttered a sharp cry of pain.

'Oh, thou wilt not mind me, Dorothy !' he added quickly. 'I did not listen to what she said, only sisters made a great deal of it. They are not like we are, thou knowest, and they thought I should speak to thy father ; and so I said that he knew it, as Charles Verschoyle was to be thy husband. I did not know what to say, and I knew he would ask thy father for thee.'

'Oh, will they tell father ?' said Dorothy piteously.

'No, I don't think so, only he may hear what I said.'

'Why didst thou say so, Josiah ? Oh, what shall I do ? father will never forgive me ! Oh, Josiah, *do* help me !'

This appeal seemed to nerve Josiah to the utmost. 'Dorothy,' he said, 'thou knowest that whatever I did for thee, I did it thinking it the best thing to do. I thought perhaps thou hadst changed thy mind. As it is, if Charles

Verschoyle has not asked thy father, he will do so now, though he and thou shouldst both refuse him.'

'I shall not see him again,' she said. 'He was angry to-day because I knew father would refuse, and so he left me.' And the fresh grief pressing on old sorrows newly awakened, Dorothy broke down, declaring she deserved it all. 'I have forgotten everything, and deceived every one,' she cried,—'father, and him, and thee, and now I must bear the punishment.' And, in her shame and grief, she hid her face in her hands.

Josiah entreated her not to give way. He was certain, he said, that he could prevent her father from being very angry, but said she had better let Charles Verschoyle write to him.

Not knowing Josiah's reasons for urging this, Dorothy declared such a thing to be impossible, as she had given Captain Verschoyle her decision, and they had, she feared, parted for good. Aunt Abigail's voice was now heard, and Dorothy had only time to run away, fearing that her eyes, red with weeping, might attract her aunt's attention.

When she again made her appearance, she complained of a headache, and Aunt Abigail, coupling her silence and depression with Josiah's visit, concluded that he had been further urging his suit. He remained to an early dinner with them, and vainly endeavoured to speak again to Dorothy. But Aunt Abigail, having made up her mind that the dear child should not be worried any further, gave him no opportunity, and he was obliged to leave them, still uncertain how he should act for the best.

Josiah was quite aware of Dorothy's position, and how

her conduct would be viewed among Friends. She would be regarded henceforth as a forward, frivolous girl, unworthy to be trusted, and not properly endowed with maidenly reserve. This would be the opinion of the most charitable, but those who lacked the chief Christian virtue would probably not spare her in thought and word ; and to a proud man like Nathaniel, this scandal would be bitter indeed. How could it be lessened ? A brilliant idea entered Josiah's mind. Surely, if Charles Verschoyle loved Dorothy as well as *he* did—he would be equally anxious that no breath of scandal should dim the purity of her actions. Josiah felt that he could explain the whole circumstances to him, and ask him to write to Nathaniel. Her father would then screen Dorothy by saying that his consent had been asked to her marriage, but that he had withheld his consent on account of difference of principles.

Many men would have sneered at the young Quaker's Quixotic love. They would have doubted its existence, perhaps, and considered that to have seen the girl who had refused him well served out, would be sweeter revenge than trying to spare her anxiety or sorrow. But this was not Josiah's nature ; he had always thought that Dorothy would find it hard to love him, and he cared for her none the less because his fears now had been realized. True he did not go through all these interviews and communings with himself without many a sad heart-ache and regret ; but even these did not make him feel bitter to her. If a slight shadow ever had come over him, one look at her had charmed it away. Captain Verschoyle, however, acted on him in a contrary manner ; *his* presence caused flames

of anger and hatred to spring up from the ashes which only smouldered within Josiah's breast. So it was no easy task to seek a meeting with him. Josiah was certain that in presence of his rival he should feel awkward and be unable properly to explain his errand. Still it seemed the best thing for him to do. He spent several hours in deciding one thing, and then changing his mind ; going half-way to the station and turning back, walking some little distance, regretting his decision, and making a second and fruitless attempt to catch a train which had almost started as he began running. At length he made a desperate resolution and arrived at Darington just before dinner.

Captain Verschoyle and Mr Egerton had just come in after a long ride, and were discussing the necessity of attending to Lady Laura's summons.

'I cannot think what they mean,' said the younger man.

'Mean !' replied Mr Egerton ; 'nothing, no woman ever does—they are tired of quarrelling together, and want you to join them. Take my advice, and don't.'

'I left them like turtle-doves,' said Captain Verschoyle, 'on account of Audrey having determined to sacrifice herself to that old Ford I told you of. Well, I shall not go to-morrow ; I'll write to my mother and ask her what she means. I don't want to leave now.'

'No,' said the old man slyly ; 'tell her that Fox-hunting is just beginning.'

Captain Verschoyle would not understand the allusion, and his companion continued, 'Capital sport, but the best men get a cropper sometimes.'

'Ah, well!' replied Captain Verschoyle, bent on remaining ignorant; 'there's not much fear of me, I'm an old hand.'

'I'll tell you what, Charlie,' but he was interrupted by the man opening the door and saying to Captain Verschoyle, 'If you please, sir, there's a gentleman in the library as wishes to see you; he told me to say Josiah Crewdson.'

Mr Egerton gave a long whistle. 'I'll be your second, Charlie,—if he's come in a blood-thirsty spirit,' he said; 'or if he only wants a peaceable fight, tell him I'll have a round with him while you are getting your wind, for I fear the little chap's more than a match for you.' But Captain Verschoyle paid no attention to this sally, he only sat for an instant frowning, and then meditatively asked, 'Now what can he want with me?'

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

TWO WAYS OF LOOKING AT IT.

DINNER had been served and Mr Egerton was half through his soup before Captain Verschoyle made his appearance.

‘ You must pardon me for being late, sir,’ he said, with a look on his countenance which checked the banter in which his old friend had been about to indulge.

Captain Verschoyle several times during dinner started topics of conversation, but with such an effort that they invariably broke down. At length, when they had turned their chairs to the fire, and there was no chance of being disturbed, the old man laid his hand kindly on his companion’s shoulder, saying, ‘ What’s the matter, Charlie? has anything gone wrong? ’

Captain Verschoyle gazed gloomily into the fire as he answered—

'No, nothing has gone wrong, only Mr Crewdson has just shown me that I am a cowardly scoundrel.'

'Ah! I've had the same idea myself,' growled Mr Egerton; then, raising his voice, he added, 'But, confound his impudence, he needn't have come here to tell you that.'

'I have been sneering at that man since ever I saw him,' continued Captain Verschoyle, speaking to himself, and giving no heed to Mr Egerton's remarks. 'I thought him one of the biggest fools in the world. I scarcely thought him worthy of common civility, and turned up my eyes at the bare idea of any woman bestowing a thought on him. Now, if any one asked me to name a man of honour and a gentleman, I'd say Josiah Crewdson.'

'Why, what for?' said Mr Egerton, in considerable amazement.

Captain Verschoyle suddenly jumped up, and said in rather a loud tone, 'I've been a coward, a villain, a scoundrel. You know, sir, it's all about Miss Fox. Almost from the first time I saw her I cared for her more than I had ever done for any other girl. I tried all I could to make her think about me, and I wasn't at peace until I was sure she loved me; and then I thought I had done a foolish thing, and must get out of it. I came to you, but I persuaded her to go to York. And because she didn't arrive there the very day I expected her, I, regardless of consequences to her, went off to Leeds to seek her. Mr Crewdson's sisters, thinking that she was going to marry their brother, did not approve of this, and said a great deal. I can't quite explain it, but it seems that if a young

lady of their persuasion receives a visit from a soldier, it in some way compromises her. And, though she had the day before refused young Crewdson, by Jove, sir ! he was plucky enough to defend her when she was attacked by his sisters, saying that I had her father's consent, and was going to marry her.'

'Well, but wasn't it true ?'

'True ? no, I was playing a game of fast and loose with her. I pretended that I wanted to marry her, and that she was treating me very hardly because she dared not disobey her father, whose consent she was sure would never be given ; and all the time I wanted to get out of it. I never intended to marry her. I knew I loved her better than all the world, but my pride wouldn't allow me to make her my wife.'

'Of course not ; as you said yourself, the very idea is absurd. Why, you told me her father kept a shop,' said Mr Egerton.

'Absurd or not, I intend doing it.'

'You do ?' roared the old man in his gruffest voice. ' You'll surely never make such a fool of yourself ! Why should you ? Who'll be the better, except a few out-of-the-way people, who, if they made their appearance among your set, would be laughed at ! Nonsense, Charlie, you'll think more about it.'

'I hope not,' said Captain Verschoyle firmly. 'One reason is, that I never rested until I had destroyed the peace of her innocent life, and caused her to reject a man who is a hundred times more worthy of her than I am. Another is, that I love her with all my abominably selfish

heart. And don't think, sir, all this is caused by young Crewdson's visit; before he came I felt I couldn't part with her, and intended seeing her to-morrow.'

'You'll be cut,' said Mr Egerton, nodding his head sententiously; 'nobody will receive her, and all your relations will turn their backs upon you.'

'Let them; it's very little good they ever did me, except patronize me and make me discontented.'

'You'll require to leave your regiment. You can't stay there, you know; and then good-bye to all your visions of military glory.'

'Yes, I know all that, but—'

'But you are determined to be an ass,' said the old man with a sneer; 'and for whom? The baby-faced daughter of a country shop-keeper. Pshaw!'

Captain Verschoyle turned scarlet, and then grew pale as he said, looking boldly at Mr Egerton—

'Perhaps I may as well tell you, sir, that you have now reached the limit of my forbearance. If Miss Fox will honour me with her hand, I shall be as proud of being her husband as if she were the daughter of a duke. And when she is my wife, *I* will take care that no one treats her with less respect than they would if the bluest blood in England flowed in her veins.'

Mr Egerton jumped up, and slapped his godson on the back.

'Give me your hand, Charlie, for I'm proud of you,' he cried. 'The world hasn't spoiled you yet, my boy, and you're worthy of your father's name. As for young Crewdson, here's three cheers for him, and good luck to

him next time. He's a Briton, that fellow, though he be a Quaker.'

There was some further giving way to their mutual good feelings, and then Mr Egerton said—

'Come now, let us have up some more wine, and then we'll settle to business, for we have forgotten one very important point ;' and making an inexpressibly droll face he said, 'How about your mother ?'

'Yes, I have thought about her, and I see no way of managing her. Of course the Hanburys will consider I have acted unfairly to them as well as to Dorothy, and will feel keenly any slight my mother might put upon her.'

'Humph ! I don't often take a scheme in hand, and it's many a year since I tackled her ladyship ; but we have had tilts before now, and I have not always come off second best. What do you say, will you trust your cause to me ?'

'Most thankfully.'

'Well, I shan't explain my tactics, but I'll do my best to show my talent as a diplomatist.'

Captain Verschoyle laughed heartily at the idea of the encounter. 'I shall go and see Dorothy to-morrow morning,' he said, 'and after that I shall decide my movements. I hope, after all, her father will be brought to give his consent.'

'Of course he will,' replied Mr Egerton ; 'and after you have seen the young lady I shall call upon her and Miss Fletcher. I'll forgive your getting married, Charlie, since she is not one of those town madams whose hollow

shams would have been more than your old godfather could have swallowed. She has a sweet innocent face, and if it *is* in the power of a woman to make a man happy, *she* ought to do it.'

Before twelve o'clock the following day Captain Verschoyle arrived at Miss Fletcher's house, where he inquired for Miss Fox.

'Please, sir, they're gone,' said the little maid.

'Gone!' said Captain Verschoyle. 'Gone where?'

'I don't know, please, sir; but mistress and Miss Dorothy went away an hour ago to the train. Perhaps you'd like to see Jane.'

So Jane came, but all the information she could give was, that a letter had come which had caused them to leave unexpectedly, and she rather thought Miss Dorothy had returned home. She could not say for certain, however, as mistress did not say; she only told her she would write when they reached their journey's end.

Captain Verschoyle did not wait to hear more, he rushed away, hardly stopping to draw breath until he reached the station; but the London train had gone. He asked one or two of the porters if two ladies—whom he described—had been passengers by it, and one man said 'Yes,' but whether they were going to London or not he could not say.

Captain Verschoyle returned to Darington, consulted with Mr Egerton, wrote a letter to Nathaniel Fox, and by the next morning's train started with his old friend for London.

Mr Egerton was dropped at his club, but Captain Vers

choyle went on to Egmont Street. Her ladyship was in her own room, and thither her son, by her desire, proceeded to see her. 'Why, mother, what's the matter?' he exclaimed, as soon as their first greetings were over, and they were alone. 'I expected to find you tearing your hair, and Audrey in a strait-waistcoat. Where is she?'

'Oh, don't speak of her, Charles! and lay aside all jesting, for I assure you our trouble is a very serious one.'

Captain Verschoyle looked very grave as he drew a chair to the fire, and sat down prepared to listen to the domestic tragedy. 'What has she been doing?' he asked.

'I need not tell *you*, Charles, all I have sacrificed for that ungrateful girl.'

'No, mother,' quickly interposed her son, dreading a repetition of the oft-told tale. 'I know you have been very good to us both.'

'Yes; but you can never understand how entirely I have forgotten myself for her sake. You remember the new dresses I gave her so recently to go to Dyne Court with, and the trouble I had to get an invitation. I almost asked Mr Ford for it, entirely on her account; for certainly I should not have sought to be the guest of a man who had probably been one of your grandfather's tradespeople. But as I thought it was to secure her a good establishment, I was content. The man paid her the greatest attention, and she seemed delighted with her prospect, and quite secure of the match. Suddenly, and apparently without any reason, she informed me that she could not marry Mr Ford, and asked me to take her away. Well, off we went, and I so managed that the old man

never suspected the cause, but set it down to my nervous fears about her health. Of course I tried to discover her reason for this extraordinary conduct, and I was led to believe it was owing to a whim of which she began to feel rather ashamed. You know how all this would try my nerves : my dear boy, I assure you, they felt shattered. When your Aunt Spencer asked me to go to Beauwood for a few days, I felt it was a duty to accept, and went, though very reluctantly. And would you believe it, Charles, while I was absent Mr Ford came here, and that miserable girl refused him ! He's a millionaire !—a Croesus ! His wealth is fabulous ! He could give her *anything* she wished for, and make any settlement we chose to name ; and she absolutely refused to marry him !'

'Well, you have amazed me !' exclaimed Captain Verschoyle—'she seemed to have made up her mind to have the old fellow. But really, mother—'

'Wait. You have not heard the worst,' interrupted Lady Laura. 'Let me give you her reason.'

'Oh ! there is a reason ?'

'Yes. The reason is'—and here her ladyship bowed her head in mock obedience to her daughter's decision—'that she has accepted, and intends to become the wife of, that poverty-stricken, Quixotic fellow Dynecourt.'

'By Jove ! You don't mean *that* ? Audrey marry Dynecourt ? Impossible !'

'It shall be, if I can make it so. The idea of the man having the impertinence to propose to a girl like Audrey, my daughter, on an income of six hundred a year. He came, too, with as much assurance as if it had been sixty

thousand. I think I rather surprised him. I did not spare them, I assure you, and he could not say a word, but sat looking at Audrey, who, with great want of delicacy, came into the room ten minutes after he arrived, and said she desired to be present.'

'Well, mother, you have electrified me ! Wonders will never cease ! Fancy Audrey marrying for love !'

'Good gracious, Charles ! is that the way you take it ?' exclaimed Lady Laura. 'Have you so little affection for your sister that you can calmly allow her to disgrace herself by marrying a man who can only give her a poky house in a bye street, and a new bonnet once a year ?'

'Don't be absurd, mother. You know Dynecourt comes of as good a family as any man in England, and as far as the name goes, there's not a woman living but might be proud to bear it.'

'May I ask you if people can live on their long pedigree and ancient name ?'

'Certainly not ; but Audrey and Dynecourt are not wholly dependent on these. I know you must be disappointed, mother, because you have always hoped so much for her. And I would rather she had chosen a man who was able to give her what, at least, she has been accustomed to ; but as to the two men, although Ford is a very decent fellow, I congratulate myself on my exchange of brothers-in-law.'

'Thank you, Charles,' said his mother, in her most severe tone ; 'I might have known if there was any way by which you could add to my annoyance you would choose it. Why I should trouble myself about you and

Audrey I cannot tell, for never was a mother so utterly disregarded and scoffed at.'

'Don't say that, for you know it is not true, mother. But if you and I were to talk for ever, we cannot alter the fact that Audrey loves this man, and knowing that, I do not see that we have any right to prevent her marrying him because he does not happen to have as much money as we wish. She has to accept the wants, and do without the luxuries, and if she is content, let us try and make the best of it, and not damp all the poor girl's happiness.'

'I'll do nothing of the kind!' exclaimed Lady Laura, passionately. 'I see through it all. Your sister and you may be very clever, but you cannot blind me. You have been laying your plans together to wheedle me out of a trousseau and a wedding such as she wants. You may both save yourselves the trouble, for I assure you, if she and her fine lover choose to marry, they can do so when and how they please, but not one farthing do they get from me.'

'Come, come, mother, you don't mean that.'

'Indeed, Charles, I do mean it.'

'What! will you allow your only daughter to leave her home as if she had no one in the world to care for her but the man who is taking her from it?'

'My only daughter has shown no more consideration for me than my only son.'

'Oh! very well, then you compel me to take my father's place,' replied Captain Verschoyle. 'I cannot give her much, but she shall have as good an outfit as I can provide, and I shall take apartments, from which she can be

properly and decently married. However, long before it comes to this, mother, I trust your good sense and right feeling will return ; just now you are allowing disappointment to get the better of you.'

'Charles, how dare you speak to me in this manner ?' cried Lady Laura. 'Oh ! nobody else *can* have two such ungrateful, unfeeling children !' and she took refuge in her handkerchief.

'I had better leave you, or we may lose our tempers,' said her son, 'which would be injurious to you and very unbecoming in me ;' and he walked out of the room.

'Poor old lady !' he thought, 'she little dreams of the bitter draught which will follow this pill. We must let her get breath before anything of mine is mentioned. It is really hard lines for her, after all her hopes, to find us making such marriages as we two seem bent upon.'

'I shall go down to Fryston to-morrow,' he continued ; 'I wonder if they have taken her there or to Devonshire. I expect it has turned out as Crewdson feared, and the old man has got scent of the thing. Serves me right for not doing it at once. But he must give in, for have her I will.—Come in,' he said aloud, in answer to a knock at the door. 'Well ! you most inconsistent of all your inconsistent sex, come here and let me look at you, that I may see if you are some changeling, or still my very sister Audrey.'

'Oh, Charlie, I am so glad to see you !'

'Ah ! you're longing to have my scolding about this Dynecourt affair over. Now look at me, and answer the following questions. Have you well considered all you are

going to give up? For, according to mamma's account, you will have to do without a great many things very dear to you.'

Audrey nodded her head.

'And you care sufficiently for this man to share his life?

'Yes, I feel like dear old Elia. I wish I could throw the remainder of our joint existences into a heap, that we might share them equally. It is of no use disguising it, Charlie; I have taken the disease in its most aggravated form, and it's going very hard with me.' Then, looking into his face, she said, 'You will try to like him, Charlie? and say you hope we may be happy.'

'I do from the very bottom of my heart,' he answered, kissing her. 'And as for Dynecourt, he's a capital fellow, and I shall be proud to call him brother. Why, Audrey, *you* crying! I have not seen you cry since you were a child. Nonsense, you stupid thing. The old lady is a little on stilts just now, but she will come all right, only give her time. You must not mind her being disappointed; that is only natural, you know. When ~~do~~ you want to run away from us?'

'Geoffrey says as soon as we can get a house. I tell him he is afraid that I shall change my mind; but there is no fear of that now.'

'Well,' said her brother, 'you know I will do all I can to smooth matters for you; and if mamma is cross, we must not seem to notice it.'

So, acting on this principle, they tried to make themselves pleasant and agreeable during dinner, but Lady

Laura would have none of their amenities. She wore her most injured air, and seldom spoke, unless to beg her daughter not to laugh, as it jarred upon her nerves ; or to ask her son not to speak *quite* so loud, as her head would not stand it.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

TRUE TO EACH OTHER.

UDREY,' said Captain Verschoyle, as they sat chatting together next morning after breakfast, 'I've something to tell you. Do you know I am more in love than I ever was before ?'

'You in love ! Nonsense, Charlie—not seriously ?'

'Yes, seriously,' he replied, stretching himself, so as to appear quite at his ease ; 'so much so that I have asked the girl to marry me.'

'Who is she ?' exclaimed Audrey, in amazement. 'Any one I know ? Not Miss Bingham ?'

'No,' laughed her brother, 'I think she had better marry old Ford, as a sort of squaring up of matters properly. But it's somebody you have seen.'

'Some one I have seen. Oh ! I should never guess, Charlie, unless it be Edith Stapleton ; but then she has only been a widow three weeks.'

'Don't be absurd,' said Captain Verschoyle ; 'what should put her into your head ?'

'Why, because you were so desperately in love with her once. I remember when you heard she was going to marry Colonel Stapleton you were frantic, and walked in front of her window almost a whole night.'

'Yes, I recollect that too,' laughed Captain Verschoyle ; 'that night cured me. I got a horrid cold, and sneezed all the love out of my head, I suppose, for certainly it had never got beyond that weak part of my body.'

'And this is, you think, a different phase of the tender passion ? You have had much experience, you know, Charlie, within my memory.'

'Yes, but all differing from this. I know that naturally I am a very selfish fellow, but somehow I feel I could give up everything for the sake of this girl.'

'Do tell me who she is, Charles ; then I shall know whether I am to put faith in you.'

'Well,' said Captain Verschoyle, feeling rather nervous, 'you remember that pretty Quaker child we saw at Plymouth ?'

'Yes.'

'Then, regardless of grammar, that's her.'

'Now I *know* you are laughing,' said Audrey, puzzled to understand what he meant.

'Indeed I am not. I am quite serious. I will tell you all about it. When in London, after leaving Dyne Court, I went to the Paddington station to inquire about my boxes ; there, to my surprise, I met Mrs Fox and her daughter. They had come up to visit another daughter,

a Mrs Hanbury, who lives at Frys頓. And seeing they were in a dilemma because of not meeting her as they had expected, I, in return for their kindness to me, volunteered to conduct them safely to Shoreditch. Mrs Hanbury took me for a friend of her mother's, and invited me to dinner. As I was alone, and did not know very well how to pass my time, I accepted, and went down the next day. I found they lived in a charming house, knew very nice people—Dynecourt, by the way, visited there—and altogether were a most refined and agreeable family. Miss Fox was going to remain there, and perhaps that induced me to make another visit to them, and so it went on until I found myself over head and ears in love. At first I thought it would share the fate of my other amours, and the flame would die out before it was well kindled. But instead of that it has gone on increasing, until I am worried with fears that her bigoted old father, who has a horror of soldiers, won't give his consent, and the child, I believe, would be frightened to death at the idea of marrying without it.'

' You don't mean to say you have asked her father ? ' said Audrey, in amazement.

' Of course I have. What else would you have me do ? ' replied her brother sharply.

' Well, I suppose nothing,' said Audrey ; ' only I wonder if you remember—' and she stopped, not knowing how to finish her sentence.

' I know what you mean,' said Captain Verschoyle, in a defiant voice ; ' you wonder because he keeps a shop ; and suppose he does, what difference does that make to

her, or to my love for her? She is as much a lady in education, thought, and feeling as any one I know.'

'Oh, I am sure of that, Charlie. You remember how much I admired her, and how astonished I was to find that you had not been more impressed with her beauty. Still I must say I am surprised at your having overcome all the notions you have hitherto held; it will be very awkward for you; everybody will naturally ask, "Who was she?"'

'Well! and let them ask. I do not care. If they have no more feeling for me than that, I am well rid of such friends. Am I to break the heart of a dear, sweet, loving girl, who, I know, would make my whole life good and happy, because her father does not happen to have a position in the great world? Suppose Dynecourt's father, or Dynecourt himself, kept a shop, what would you do?'

'Help him in the business now, my dear; but had such been the case I am not quite certain that I should have so readily fallen in love with him.'

'Had I seen Dorothy surrounded by anything but refinement, neither should I. Remember when I first saw her and mistook the servant for her mother, I never gave her a thought. But when I met her and her relations, perfect in manner and breeding, and with all the luxuries and elegancies of wealth about them, the whole thing was changed. In the same way you thanked Mr Ford for the honour he had conferred on you by proposing that you should become the mistress of Dyne Court. But had he kept the establishment of his early days and walked from behind the counter to entreat you to be Mrs Richard

Ford, you would have told him he was ready for a lunatic asylum, or he could never have forgotten the difference between your station and his own.'

'Quite true, Charlie dear,' said Audrey, giving him a kiss. 'Still you must forgive me for expressing some astonishment, and also for asking you whether you have considered all you are giving up. If you married without money, I suppose you would be obliged to sell out?'

'Yes. But really, Audrey, I am thoroughly sick of soldiering. Harry Egerton and I went into things the other night, and I should have about six hundred a year. I would much rather live in the country than in the town. You know I hate balls and dinners. I am getting too old for such things. A snug little place and a sweet little wife are a great deal more to my fancy now.'

'Oh, you dear old thing!' laughed his sister, giving him another hug. 'I believe it is true. Why, you are getting absolutely romantic. Of course she is dreadfully in love with *you*!'

'Well, I believe she is,' said Captain Verschoyle, 'but the last time I saw her I gave way to my abominable temper and went off in a huff.' He then proceeded to relate that the next morning, being repentant, he had called, but found that Dorothy and her aunt had left. 'But I fancy they have only gone to Fryston, and I shall run down there in an hour's time to see. I do hope the old man will write to me. I quite expected to have had an answer to my letter this morning. I do not see that he can say anything but "Yes," for, to satisfy his scruples of conscience, I offered to give up my profession.'

The sister and brother had a little more conversation about their future hopes and plans, and then Captain Verschoyle started for Fryston. He would have felt very uneasy about his reception, had his thoughts not been engrossed with Dorothy. He had no doubt that she would forgive him, especially when he told her he had written to her father offering for her sake to become a man of peace.

Fryston Grange, even in winter, when the trees were no longer clothed with their leafy coverings, was a pretty place. As Captain Verschoyle walked towards the house he felt he had very little to offer Dorothy in comparison with the comforts her sister enjoyed. Love was beginning to work a complete change in the man's nature. It was making him uncertain of his own merits and doubtful as to his success. He had seldom felt more thoroughly ill at ease than he did during the few minutes he sat in Mrs Hanbury's drawing-room, waiting for her to make her appearance

The door opened, and instead of Grace, Dorothy came to meet him. How was it that Charles Verschoyle, feeling more love for her than he had ever done before, seemed all at once utterly incapable of giving expression to it? Josiah Crewdson himself could not have been more embarrassed. He stood holding both her hands in his until Dorothy looked into his face for the cause of his changed manner. But the gaze she met must have satisfied her, for the blood came rushing to her cheeks as she stammered—

‘I am so glad to see thee again. Grace is not at home; she has taken Aunt Abigail for a drive.’

'I do not deserve this happiness, Dorothy,' Captain Verschoyle at last got power to say; 'but I have been wretched since our last meeting.'

And the next half-hour was taken up in listening to all the self-inflicted woes and torments only pleasing to the ears of those for whom they are endured. After this, their hopes and fears regarding her father's consent had to be discussed, and then Captain Verschoyle looked very grave as he said--

'Dorothy, I have done much that needs to be forgiven by you.'

Dorothy looked up surprised.

'Yes,' he added; 'I fear had you possessed more worldly knowledge, and read me truly, you would never have given me your love. I had no right to ask it from you when I did, but I was so anxious to hear that the treasure which I coveted was mine that I did not care what you suffered. I had no right to go to York, or to induce you to go there, without first speaking to your family; it was taking advantage of the trusting innocence of a child—for such you are compared with me, Dorothy. And it was selfishness that took me to Leeds, causing me to be utterly unmindful of how much you might suffer for it. Oh, my darling! I cannot forgive myself.'

'But I can forgive thee,' she said, putting her hand into his. 'I too acted wrongly in going to see the Crewdsons, because I knew father would not approve of thee; but, Charles, thou hast told him thou wilt give up being a soldier?'

'Yes, dear. Dorothy, I have but little to offer you. I

am but a poor man, as well as a very indifferent and selfish one.'

She put her hand across his mouth, saying—

‘Thou shalt not say so to me.’

‘Ah! but it is true,’ he laughed, delighted at her sweet contradiction; ‘but if my Dolly will but try, I think she will make me, if not a Quaker, at least a better and a happier man.’

An hour passed before Captain Verschoyle rose to go. ‘I shall now see Mr Hanbury,’ he said, ‘and you will tell your sister I came purposely to talk to her, and that if she will permit me I shall come again on Wednesday or Thursday, or whenever I hear from your father.’ He held her from him, and looking into her face, said earnestly, ‘He cannot, I think, say No; but, Dorothy, if he should, would you give me up?’

‘No, Charles, I cannot take back my love. Whatever comes now, it is thine for ever.’

‘Then mine is yours; and, child, if we are but true to each other, surely God will help us.’

CHAPTER XL.

SUCCESSFUL DIPLOMACY.

HEN Captain Verschoyle next met Mr Eger-ton, he told his old friend that he had seen Dorothy at Fryston, and had made all straight with John Hanbury. 'He does not give me much hope of obtaining Mr Fox's consent,' he said. 'It seems he had set his heart upon his daughter marrying young Crewdson, who is uncommonly rich, so I dare say, besides his horror at having a soldier for a son-in-law, he will think I have not money enough.'

'Horror!' repeated the old gentleman. 'Why should a parcel of Quakers turn up their noses at honest men because they're soldiers? Confound their ingratitude; if I come across old Fox I'll give him a bit of my mind. *His principles*, forsooth! What would have been the good of his principles in Siberia or some such outlandish place, where we might all have been in prison now hadn't it been for such as you? though I dare say,' he added, fearing he

was scattering his praise too freely, 'you did not manage to find yourself in front when the fighting began.'

Captain Verschoyle laughed at this imputation on his gallantry, and the old man continued—

‘James Allan, of York, is a connection of the Foxes, and I asked him about them; he says they are very wealthy people. Of course you know that?’

‘No. I do not believe they are wealthy; but I have not given money a thought. I have no doubt they are tolerably well off—nothing more.’

‘Positively, your attachment is quite Arcadian in its simplicity,’ said Mr Egerton with one of his old sneers. ‘Have you spoken to your mother yet?’

‘No; I am leaving that to you. I was thinking if we could only get her to take up the cudgels we might gain an easy victory.’

‘A very sensible idea, by Jove! I should like to see your mother tackle the broad-brimmers.’

‘If we could only manage an interview between her and Mr Fox,’ said Captain Verschoyle, laughing at the absurdity of the thought, but without any idea of carrying it into practice.

‘We’ll do it, Charlie,’ exclaimed Mr Egerton, delighted at the prospect of such an encounter, ‘and I’ll back her ladyship. So to-morrow I shall call at Egmont Street about twelve o’clock; and be sure that you and Audrey are out of the way.’

The scheme which Mr Egerton had formed for obtaining Lady Laura’s consent to her son’s *mésalliance* was founded on the information he had obtained in York

respecting Nathaniel Fox and his family. There was no doubt that Nathaniel was a rich man, for to his own money had been added his wife's fortune. Besides this, Dorothy would be certain to inherit the portion which her grandfather had left to her Aunt Abigail. Therefore, quite unconsciously, Charles had wooed an heiress, and Mr Egerton knew that wealth was the 'open sesame' to Lady Laura's heart.

Arrived at Egmont Street, Mr Egerton put Lady Laura in good humour at once, by saying, apparently to himself, in his gruffest voice, 'Hum ! younger than ever. *Some* people don't know how to get old ;' whereupon Lady Laura was most cordial in her greeting, and became quite interested in an attack of gout he had lately suffered from.

At length he said, 'Oh ! by the way, I suppose I ought to congratulate you on getting rid of that shop-chandler son-in-law whom Audrey had set her mind upon giving you when I last heard from you.'

Lady Laura winced

'Abominable old bear,' she thought ; 'he wants to annoy me, but he shall not be gratified by seeing it ;' so, without appearing at all vexed, she said, 'Thanks—although I do not know that I care much for the exchange she has made.'

'Well, but Dynecourt comes of an excellent family,' continued Mr Egerton.

'Granted ; only when people are not worth a penny, their family is of little importance.'

‘ Still you would rather have a man of your own class for your son-in-law, I suppose?’

‘ I should not have objected to Mr Ford,’ said Lady Laura, smiling blandly; ‘ and I wonder at your asking me about it. I thought you were so fond of the *bourgeoisie*, that you considered *they* conferred honour upon us in the alliances which we formed with them.’

‘ I don’t know about that,’ replied Mr Egerton. ‘ I think they generally get the worst of the bargain.’

Lady Laura shrugged her shoulders. ‘ I look upon the matter as a fair exchange,’ she said. ‘ If they did not want blood, they would not marry us; and if we did not want money, assuredly we should never marry them. Had I a fortune to give to Audrey and Charles, I should expect they would make their choice from their own set. But as wealth has been denied to us, I do not consider that my son or my daughter will lose caste if they marry persons connected with business, provided their fortunes are sufficiently ample to silence people’s remarks, or give a *suspicion* of envy to those they make.’

‘ Very sensibly put,’ exclaimed Mr Egerton. ‘ I wish I had only known that your sentiments were so liberal, Lady Laura. I always imagined you had a horror of everybody connected with trade.’

‘ Well, trade is an odious word, certainly; but no one regards a wealthy man, like Mr Ford, for instance, as a common shopkeeper.’

‘ Still, I have heard that he kept a shop, or his father did before him.’

‘Oh dear!’ exclaimed Lady Laura, raising her hand with a deprecatory movement. ‘In these days of parvenus, fathers are ignored, and it is the worst possible taste to talk of any family but your own; if that happens to be good, speak of it by all means, for these people worship rank and breeding.’

‘Two things their money can’t buy, eh?’

‘Of course not. They must gain them by reflection, so they marry into good families—a very laudable thing too; they are then received into society on account of the wife’s or husband’s standing.’

‘Ah! I wish I had known your opinions before,’ said Mr Egerton mysteriously.

‘Why? For what reason?’

‘Well,’ replied the old man with a charming air of candour, ‘perhaps I ought not to speak of it; but I hate secrets, and as you’re his mother, it cannot much matter.’

Lady Laura threw off her *nonchalant* air at once, and gave undivided attention to Mr Egerton’s conversation.

‘It appears that some time ago ‘Charlie’s fancy was taken by a very pretty girl he saw. He found that her father was a woollen manufacturer, or something of that sort, in the West of England, so he tried to forget her. At York, however, they met by accident again, and then he told me about it, saying, as he knew you would never receive her, he should try to overcome his affection.’

‘Most certainly not,’ said Lady Laura firmly.

‘Oh! well then, that’s all right; for since you have been talking I have been wondering if I had been to blame in the matter.’

‘You to blame! How?’

‘Well, of course, I made inquiries about the family, for her aunt happens to be a neighbour of mine. And, by Jove! I discovered they are very wealthy people. The girl will have a large fortune from her father, besides her mother’s money and this maiden aunt’s.’

‘You don’t say so!’ exclaimed Lady Laura. ‘What did Charles say?’

‘Oh! I have never told him. I thought, if I did, perhaps he wouldn’t agree to give her up.’

‘And why on earth should he, if she has all this money?’

‘Why, as I told you, her father is a tradesman: may keep a draper’s shop, for anything I know.’

‘My dear Mr Egerton, now you are too absurd. You know what Charles’s income is, and how extravagant his habits are. Unless he marries a girl with money, what is he to do? He is tired of being a soldier, and wants a home; and how is he to get one? If the girl is at all decent, and has a fortune, and such prospects as you describe, he could not do better than marry her. And he ought to know that I have his happiness too much at heart to put any obstacle in his way.’

Mr Egerton’s brown eyes grew quite bright, and twinkled at the success of his scheme.

‘You really surprise me; I thought you would have been distracted about it,’ he said. ‘And you have not heard all yet,—they are Quakers!’

‘Quakers!’ echoed Lady Laura. ‘What, those people who wear the horrid bonnets and grey gowns? Oh!

Charles must have known she had money. No man could fall in love with a woman disguised in that manner. Impossible !'

'Is it ? I can tell you, my dear lady, I have not seen anything so sweet for a very long time ; she's as fresh as a blush rose. If all the women are like her, I ought to thank my stars I was not brought up a broad-brimmer.'

'Then you have seen her ?' she asked.

'Yes, she was staying at Leeds with some people I know, and I offered to escort her to York, knowing nothing about Charlie, you see.'

'And Charles likes the girl, and you know she has lots of money, and is charming, and yet you are allowing her to slip through his fingers. What absurd notions men take into their heads, to be sure ! This, I suppose, then, was the cause of his giving up Miss Bingham and her £50,000 ?

'Well, if he can get this girl, he need never repent that sacrifice.'

'You don't mean it ?' replied Lady Laura, delighted. 'But have you made every inquiry ? Is your authority reliable ?'

'Oh ! her mother's family have lived about York for years ; they are very quiet people, spending little, and this girl's father married twice, each time a lady with money. The Quakers are generally moneyed folk, you know. The girl's mother was the second wife.'

'And Charles really admires her, and is trying to overcome it on my account ?' said Lady Laura. 'Dear boy !'

'Well, perhaps I must not give him too much credit

for self-denial !' laughed the old gentleman. ' To tell you the truth, he *has* proposed for her, and her father refuses his consent.'

' And why? For what?' exclaimed her ladyship indignantly.

' The reason he gives is, that Charles is a soldier, and not a Quaker.'

' Oh ! those reasons can be easily overcome,' replied Lady Laura confidentially. ' Charles already intends to give up his profession, which the old man need not know, and therefore will take as a concession to his wishes. Then he can go to the chapel with them for a little time ; that is often done. Sir Francis Charlton always went to early prayers with that rich Miss Jones until they were married, and I am sure those Dalrymple girls went for months to some little conventicle because they wanted to catch Lord Kilmarsch. I took Audrey there once, and I thought I should have died. However, we never went again, for before the end of the next week we heard he had married his old tutor's daughter. Oh ! that can easily be managed. I must have a talk with Charles. I shall tell him I feel much hurt at his want of confidence in his mother. My children never seem to comprehend that the one object of my life has been to make them happy.'

' It was rather rash of him, though,' said Mr Egerton, ' to propose without knowing whether the girl had a penny.'

' But don't you think he must have known something of it?' replied Lady Laura.

'No; for he does not believe it now. The real motive which the father has for refusing Charles is, that he wants his daughter to marry a man to whom she was half engaged when she met Charles—a man of enormous wealth.'

'Now, is not that exactly like those rich people?' asked her ladyship in an injured tone. 'They are so fearfully avaricious; all they think about is money. Odious old man! And he would sacrifice his daughter?'

'Oh yes! without a scruple,' replied Mr Egerton. 'Her father thinks *he* ought to choose her husband for her.'

'Absurd!' exclaimed her ladyship. 'But what is their name?'

'Fox. The other members of the family favour Charles; only the old man seems to be against him.'

'Well, I call it very, very unkind of Charles,' said Lady Laura, 'to allow all this to go on without mentioning it to his mother.'

'Well, I dare say he would have done so, but he thought you had been worried enough lately. But now I shall tell him I have spoken to you, and that he had better act upon your advice, which we know is always good.'

Mr Egerton and Lady Laura parted mutually pleased with each other—he at the success of his undertaking, she at the prospect of her son securing a rich wife, for her ill-fortune with Audrey had shaken her confidence and made her fear that Charles would also disappoint her hopes. She now saw that these fears were not groundless.

According to Harry Egerton's account he was partially ignorant of the girl's expectations (not that she quite believed that)—still it savoured of imprudence to propose without consulting her, and the sooner he married the better.

So Lady Laura was impatient until she saw Captain Verschoyle. She then acted with much caution, speaking of little else than her great love for him, her desire to see him settled, and her readiness to promote his happiness in every way. She readily acceded to his request that she would call upon the Hanburys when Mr Fox's consent was obtained, and fixed the following Thursday for her visit. 'You can write and say that we are coming, Charles, and that will remove the awkwardness of a first meeting.'

This prospect, and a letter from Miss Brocklehurst, somewhat softened her towards Audrey, who, she now knew, had already met Miss Fox. Audrey praised the young lady's beauty, described the house and grounds, and did all in her power to strengthen her mother's favourable opinion of the match.

'When I call I shall take you with me,' said Lady Laura, 'and remember that we go very quietly dressed. You can put on your brown silk, and I shall wear black, and Marshall must take the feather out of my bonnet.'

'Really, mamma,' said Audrey, 'I do not see any necessity for that.'

'I dare say you do not; but however little *you* may have appreciated it, I have made it my rule through life

never to consider myself when the happiness and interest of my children are at stake. When I visit these people I shall adapt myself as much as possible to their habits and manners, and I trust, for your brother's sake, Audrey, you will endeavour to do the same.'

CHAPTER XLI.

WHICH IS IT TO BE?

UDREY did not require to don her most sober-looking dress, nor did Lady Laura require to dismount her feather, for the visit to Fryston had to be postponed. Next morning's post brought a most decided refusal of Captain Verschoyle's suit, to which Nathaniel Fox said his conscience and his principles alike forbade him to listen.

Captain Verschoyle went at once to Mr Hanbury's office, but was told that he had not been there that morning. This decided him to take the train to Fryston, on reaching which he learnt from Grace that on the previous evening her father had arrived from Leeds, and had that morning started for King's-heart, taking Dorothy with him. 'She left this note for you,' said Grace, 'and I need not tell you in what distress the poor child was. I fear this is a hopeless case, Captain Verschoyle.'

Captain Verschoyle read Dorothy's note, and then he set his face firmly, as one who makes a strong resolve.

'No, Mrs Hanbury,' he answered, 'it is not hopeless, and never shall be as long as your sister is true to what she says here. As she bids me hope on, I believe we shall yet conquer.'

So it was agreed that Charles Verschoyle should continue his visits to Fryston, where he would get all the tidings they could give him of Dorothy, and of the success of her plan to soften her father.

Nathaniel Fox had gone to Leeds to see Josiah Crewdson, and learn from him the reason for his assertion that Dorothy, with her father's consent, was engaged to marry Charles Verschoyle. So taxed, Josiah had told Nathaniel the whole story, and his motive for thus silencing his sisters' indignant wrath.

The old man thanked him for dealing so kindly ; and after a time, seeing that either he must bear the blame of inconsistency, or his daughter the shame of indecorum and levity, he decided to take refuge in that stronghold of Friends' principles—silence. He would be silent to the rebukes ; listen—without defending himself—to the condemnation ; and bear whatever blame the members of the Society chose to accord to him ; all this his conscience allowed. But to permit his daughter to marry a man of whom he knew nothing, and who belonged to a profession which he considered ungodly and profane, was not to be thought of ; therefore he decidedly said 'No.'

Josiah tried every argument to move him, but in vain ; he only made him say angrily, that *he* had no reason to

plead the cause of a woman who had treated him so unfairly.

‘No,’ said Josiah, ‘not so. She told me and thee she would strive to do as we wished. I believe she did strive and failed. I feel that I could have no chance with such a man as Charles Verschoyle, who, though a soldier, is no mere worldling. Never think I feel angry with Dorothy. Though she could not give me her love, she stirred up something within me which has given me a hope that some day I may again try my fate, and by this teaching, hard as it seems, succeed better.’

So winter fairly set in, Christmas went past, and the new year was born. Audrey’s wedding was to take place within a week, and in the bustle of preparation Lady Laura ceased to scheme for obtaining the consent of that ‘self-willed, avaricious, wicked old man,’ as she persisted in calling Nathaniel Fox.

Her ladyship had been several times to see Mrs Hanbury. Between Grace and Audrey a mutual affection had sprung up, which was likely to be increased as Geoffrey Dynecourt had decided upon taking a house at Fryston.

All Lady Laura saw and learnt from Grace confirmed her belief that Dorothy was worth the exertions which she considered she was urging her son to make. So she decided that whenever Audrey was fairly off her hands, she would strain every nerve to bring matters to a favourable conclusion.

Captain Verschoyle, on his part, was willing to listen to any scheme likely to give him what was now the one

desire and wish of his life ; but as week after week rolled on he grew more despondent. He had written to Mr Egerton saying, that this suspense was so unendurable that he should come down to Darington to consult him. A letter which he received at this time from Lord Morpeth offering him, if he still thought of selling out, a colonial appointment, caused him to resolve upon at once deciding his fate, and he started the next day for King's-heart.

Dorothy did not know that she was to see her lover that day, or she would have fancied that January had suddenly changed to June. As it was, the wintry sun striving to shine gave her no gladness ; it could not make the day bright for her. Poor Dorothy ! she had spent two weary months. Sometimes hope seemed so bright that nothing could extinguish it, at other times so dim that nothing could rekindle it. Her mother's face had a troubled anxious look, as if she knew that her child had a sorrow which she could not bear for her. And Dorothy's languid movements and forced smiles seemed to pierce Nathaniel's heart with a sharper pang.

The unusually loud ring of the bell did not, as it used to do, make Dorothy run to the window, or stand on the footstool or on tiptoe, to see who their visitor was. Patience wondered who it could be, but Dorothy did not care. When Lydia opened the door, it was Charles Verschoyle who stood on the threshold.

It was several minutes before either Dorothy or he remembered more than that they were in each other's company again. After some little time, Captain Verschoyle told his errand, and then he turned to Patience and said—

‘Mrs Fox, you are aware that my dearest wish is to have Dorothy for my wife. I asked her father for his consent, and he refused it because I was a soldier. In deference to his scruples, I offered to give up my profession — still he refused. I have waited for two months hoping he would alter his decision, but he remains inflexible. Yesterday morning my uncle offered me a desirable appointment, and I have come here to know whether I shall accept or refuse it. I have no wish to influence Dorothy to disobey her father, but if she loves me as I love her, she will now consent to be my wife, and I shall accept Lord Morpeth’s offer. But if she feels that she cannot disregard her father’s wish, and that her love for me is not strong enough to overcome all obstacles, I shall remain in my profession. And as these rumours of disaffection in India will cause many regiments to be sent there, I shall at once apply for foreign service. This suspense has become to me unendurable. I feel it would either kill me or kill my love. Besides, after a certain point I consider that even parental obedience has a limit. Surely hearts, not hands, are meant when it is said, “What God hath joined together let not man put asunder.” Dorothy,’ he continued, looking beseechingly towards her, ‘you have heard what I have said, your heart will decide ; tell me, which is it to be?’

‘I will be thine,’ she said, putting her hand in his. ‘Oh mother !’ she cried, ‘remember what thou once told me I ought to feel. I do feel all that, and much more, towards him. It is not want of love to thee and father which makes me choose as I do. Thou must forgive me !’

'I do, my child,' said Patience. 'I shall never blame thee, and I will do my best to soften thy father; but before I can say more on this subject he must be consulted. Charles Verschoyle had better go to Plymouth and speak to thy father, and tell him what thou hast said in my presence. And when he comes home thou must be frank, and give him thy decision, with thy reasons for it.'

Captain Verschoyle carried out this arrangement, and the result was that after a lengthened and stormy interview Nathaniel demanded three days for consideration, during which time Charles Verschoyle should hold no communication with Dorothy; then he would give his answer.

To this Captain Verschoyle was obliged to consent, although it was just then rather hard upon him, as it was impossible for him to stay in Plymouth to hear it. The day on which Nathaniel's decision was to be given had been fixed for Audrey's wedding; a wedding that, notwithstanding all Lady Laura's arguments to the contrary, was to be a very quiet one.

All her ladyship's anger had vanished. She was well up in the Dynecourt pedigree, and after giving some parvenu friend or money-seeking mother a history of their long descent from almost royal ancestors, she would end by saying,—'Of course I can say nothing to Audrey, for I made a love match myself, and refused the most eligible "parties" of that season for her dear father. Girls can very seldom secure everything. One must generally give up family or money, and I am quite content with the choice Audrey has made; for, after all, money only buys toleration.'

